



WAY OF CHOICES

BOOK 09

Mao Ni

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

Way of Choices

(Ze Tian ji)

(择天记)

by

Mao Ni

(猫腻)

Synopsis

To pick is to choose. This is a story about choices. Three thousand worlds full of gods and demons, with a daoist scroll in your hand, you are able to control the entire universe...

At the beginning of time, a mystical meteor came crashing down from outer space and scattered all over the world. A piece of it landed in the Eastern Continent. There were mysterious totems carved upon the meteor. Through viewing these totems, mankind comprehended the Dao and established the Orthodoxy.

Several thousand years later, the fourteen years old orphan Chen Changsheng left his master to cure his illness and change his fate. He brought a part of a marriage vow with him to the capital, thus beginning the journey of a rising hero...

Copyright

All rights reserved.

English Translation Hypersheep325; Pipipingu, Translator Emeritus @ [Binggo&Corp Translations](#)

Translations Edits by bbkgs @ [Binggo&Corp Translations](#)

ePub conversion by Lisa Hayes @ [Hasseno Blog](#)

This is a free eBook. You are free to give it away (in unmodified form) to whomever you wish.

No part of this eBook may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the author.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Chapter 801 – Praising the Divine

The entire world knew that when the Prince of Zhongshan was exiled from the capital, it was only because he had feigned insanity and eaten feces that the Divine Empress did not have him executed. His temper was abnormally irritable, and it was often the case that he would have someone killed at the smallest disagreement. The An Hua of the past, even if possessing the most serene of Dao hearts, would still have felt a little nervous when confronting this mad prince. Now, however, she was not.

Because she had recently experienced close-up the Pope's heart which was as vast as the sea of stars, and the sunlight of his warmth.

The will of the Pope had always been with her, just like the Sacred Light, so what did she have to be afraid of?

She calmly looked at the Prince of Zhongshan, clearly not intending to alter her account.

"Since that person is still alive, why did you not come together?" asked the official from the Grand Court of Revision, frowning slightly. "A Divine General was killed. This is a major incident. Putting aside the fact that he's also suspicious, even if he's just providing evidence, he should still have come here."

When they had received confirmation that the owner of the Cinnabar Pill was dead, everyone naturally wanted to know where the recipe for the Cinnabar Pill was.

But now that they had confirmed that he was not dead, that person was naturally more important than the recipe.

An Hua replied, "He had a pressing matter and could not come. He specifically wrote a letter describing the circumstance that night."

Just as she was preparing to take out the letter, the hall rang with

Divine General Cheng Tao's extremely harsh voice. "How bold! To dare to deceive all these important figures with a letter! This a major incident, and His Highness has personally come as an imperial envoy. Just who is this person, defying an imperial decree?"

An Hua's expression did not change as she calmly said, "Even if Your Highness truly did take out an imperial decree, it would be meaningless."

As she said these words, her eyes fell on the Prince of Zhongshan.

The hall became a clamor of noise, followed soon after by laughter.

Everyone was treating these words of hers as a joke.

But the Prince of Zhongshan did not laugh, although An Hua had been speaking to him, although he really was carrying an imperial decree.

There was one other person that was not laughing: Tianhai Chenwen. That trap in the snowy mountains had been a scheme of the capital's Imperial Palace and the Tang clan, resting on that young array master, and its aim was precisely to find and kill Chen Changsheng. This plan was kept so under wraps that not even the Prince of Zhongshan or Tianhai Chenwen knew of it, but they were both possessed of extremely high status and had a few snippets of information. It was just that they had still not been able to confirm that this information was true. Now, when they saw An Hua's serene expression, they could not help but feel a little astonished, secretly wondering, could it truly be the case?

The official from the Grand Court of Revision jeered, "Is your meaning that this person is His Holiness the Pope?"

"Correct."

An Hua took out the letter and looked at the important personages in the hall. "This is precisely a letter personally written

by His Holiness. Is there a lord present that will come and accept it?"

What? A letter personally written by His Holiness?

That person was His Holiness the Pope?

The official thought that he had heard incorrectly. After a few moments, he came to his senses and almost fell unconscious.

The other people were not in a much better state. They sat in their chairs like statues, unable to move or speak.

The hall had just been filled with noise a few moments ago, but now it was completely still and abnormally quiet.

This seemingly eternal silence placed a massive pressure on these powerful figures. They glanced at each other, shock filling their eyes.

After some time, a person finally spoke.

Tianhai Chenwen's voice was still low and deep, but one might notice a few intangible emotions if they carefully listened.

"You are saying that the maker of the Cinnabar Pill is His Holiness the Pope?"

An Hua replied, "Precisely."

Tianhai Chenwen said no more, appearing to very randomly glance at the official from the Grand Court of Revision.

These important figures were all accustomed to the ups and downs of bureaucracy, the mortal struggles of the Imperial Court. They were all old schemers that could very quickly react.

The official patted the table and stared into An Hua's eyes, coldly saying, "Truly absurd! His Holiness is the master of the Li Palace, bearing the hopes of the millions of believers of the Orthodoxy. His benevolence and affection are unmatched! If the Cinnabar Pill truly did come from His Holiness the Pope's hands, His Holiness would assuredly have already passed the recipe to the Orthodoxy

or the Imperial Court for mass production. How could His Holiness disregard the desperate situation of all the soldiers teetering on the verge of death on the frontlines and only produce one bottle a month! How could His Holiness be someone who cheats the people to win fame, a lowly person who controls treasures to coerce the Imperial Court!"

After listening to this, Divine General Cheng Tao, who had been afraid to speak out of concern that he might offend the Pope, felt relieved, as did all the other people in the room.

The circumstances of the investigation held within the army headquarters was constantly being sent out to the crowd on the streets. When they learned of this news, the crowd instantly erupted into a clamor.

The mystical Cinnabar Pill had actually been personally refined by His Holiness the Pope!

People began surging towards the gate of the army headquarters, packing the street as they shouted.

But when the words of the Grand Court of Revision official were sent out, the street suddenly fell silent.

The words of that official had been very sinister.

If An Hua insisted that the Pope had personally refined the Cinnabar Pill, how could this problem be addressed? The Cinnabar Pill had only appeared a bit more than a year ago. Many people, especially those who did not have the chance to obtain a Cinnabar Pill and those who could only watch as their fellow soldiers, companions, and relatives die, had all asked similar questions.

Since the Cinnabar Pill could regrow bones and cure the dying, why... why was that person not willing to make more?

The long street was completely still at this moment, with countless people looking towards the army headquarters, seeking an answer.

Your Holiness the Pope, in all your benevolence, how could you bear to see so many people die?

"In the past, I once thought the same as my lords and the people outside. I was greatly confused, even angered at this problem."

An Hua looked at the official from the Grand Court of Revision and continued, "But now I will not, because I know that the Cinnabar Pill has an extremely rare ingredient that only His Holiness can offer. Thus, even if the recipe is given to the Li Palace or the Imperial Court, it would be meaningless. Moreover, only that limited number of pills can be produced every month."

The Prince of Zhongshan narrowed his eyes at these words, a deeper meaning concealed in this action. Tianhai Chenwen also kept his silence.

The official had not been reminded of anything. With a cold smile, he said, "This official truly wishes to know, just what medicinal ingredient is so rare that it cannot even be found in the Hundred Herb Garden or the Dallying Forest? What ingredient is so scarce that only His Holiness can find it?"

From a logical perspective, there was nothing wrong with this argument. It would assuredly hold against any sort of scrutiny.

Yet he very quickly discovered that he had once more committed an unpardonable mistake.

Because An Hua began her answer.

"Because that ingredient is His Holiness's sacred blood!"

She spoke with pride and radiance, and her bright voice resounded both within and without the army headquarters, falling in the ears of countless people.

"In order to save all living beings, His Holiness did not hesitate to consume his life, transforming his sacred blood into a pill, the Cinnabar Pill!"

Both the people inside and outside the Mount Song Army headquarters could not help but gasp and shout in shock.

And then all sound vanished.

On the street and within the army headquarters, all was quiet.

For a very long time, nobody spoke.

An Hua's gaze flitted past the official from the Grand Court of Revision and all the important figures as she asked, "Do my lords have anything else that they want to ask?"

Still nobody spoke.

The Prince of Zhongshan and Tianhai Chenwen glanced at each other, seeing the shock and wariness in each other's eyes.

Chapter 802 – The Divine Edict Descends Like Thunder

The Prince of Zhongshan and Tianhai Chenwen were the two people with the highest status present today, so they knew the most secrets. They had even heard that someone in Gaoyang Village had seen a black dragon. For various extremely complex reasons, they had not believed it—until it was finally confirmed that the owner of the Cinnabar Pill really was Chen Changsheng...

Now that they thought about it, someone had obviously concealed the true circumstance of that night from them, or misled them.

In all the world, just who else could simultaneously deceive both a prince of the Chen clan and the Tianhai clan?

It was obviously the venerable master of the Dao who resided deep within the palace.

That night had turned out to be an assassination planned out by Shang Xingzhou, aimed at his own student.

Zhu Ye, Ning Shiwei, and the rest had just been knives, or a few pitiful blades of grass that had been drowned in the flood.

But probably not even Shang Xingzhou could have expected that his excellent student had surprisingly not died.

Since Chen Changsheng did not die, many other people would have to die.

Zhu Ye, Ning Shiwei and their group were already dead, but perhaps they would have to die a second time, and those people who were still alive needn't be discussed.

The high-ranking official from the Grand Court of Revision had an extremely nasty complexion as he walked up to An Hua. He extended both hands to receive the letter, his voice slightly

trembling as he asked, "Does His Holiness the Pope have any orders?"

An Hua replied, "His Holiness the Pope wrote in the letter that Zhu Ye, Ning Shiwei, and the rest are all co-conspirators in treachery, but the specific charges are for the Imperial Court to decide."

Hearing this, the official felt relieved. As they were already dead, it would be much simpler to deal with them.

An Hua continued, "His Holiness also wanted me to ask just how the Ministry of the Army chooses its talents."

She was just a normal teacher from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, but she was currently asking questions on behalf of the Pope.

Divine Generals Cheng Tao and Jian Xi came from the two most important army headquarters of the Great Zhou, so they could be said to represent the Great Zhou Army.

So this question was naturally for them.

Cheng Tao and Jian Xi no longer dared to remain sitting. They stood and slowly lowered their heads, silently and respectfully listening.

An Hua turned her gaze to the other important personages.

Tianhai Chenwen gave a self-mocking smile. Then, bracing his arms against the armrests of his chair, he slowly rose, appearing especially tired.

The Prince of Zhongshan was the imperial envoy and carried with him an imperial decree, so he did not need to rise. However, his expression did become much more dignified.

"His Holiness said that he is very disappointed in the current Great Zhou."

An Hua's voice was still very serene. "From the northern border

to the Imperial Court, from the Divine Generals to the noble clans, they are all rotten to the core."

These words were very tough and spoken with a lofty tone.

In the mouth of an ordinary person, these words were just a complaint, but when spoken by the Pope, they naturally carried a completely different meaning.

The Prince of Zhongshan and Tianhai Chenwen once more glanced at each other, the wariness in their eyes even more prominent. The Pope naturally had the right to say these words, even had the right to curse and berate anyone beneath the emperor, but as this matter involved government affairs, what meaning did talking like this have other than venting his spleen?

In their view, although the Pope was young, he would not do something meaningless. There had to be more.

Just as expected, An Hua shifted topics, saying, "Only Chen Chou, originally commander of Seven Li Xi's roaming cavalry..."

Chen Chou had said nothing this entire time. He was incredibly nervous.

As he watched An Hua calmly speak to these great personages, he felt deep admiration for her.

He had no idea that she would so quickly mention him.

Although he had already made some mental preparations, he still felt like his mind was buzzing, and he could not hear all of what An Hua was saying.

Outstanding military achievement? Fine, I really did accumulate a lot of military merit together with that fellow in Seven Li Xi, but wasn't it all suppressed by the army headquarters?

Loving his soldiers like his own sons? Letting them wear his clothes and feeding them good food? Fine, although I truly did treat my subordinates rather well, but how could I let them go

when they encountered wine and meat?

Incredibly virtuous? Fine, I truly didn't hesitate to break military law to save that young array master, leaving the Mount Song Army headquarters, but Your Holiness, you should understand the most... wasn't that just acting according to the plans of your enemies?

Chen Chou finally woke from his daze, just in time to hear An Hua's last few statements.

"His Holiness believes that only a soldier like General Chen Chou can bear the heavy responsibility of defeating the demons."

An Hua looked around at the important figures within the hall.

Divine Generals Cheng Tao and Jian Xi both had very nasty expressions while Tianhai Chenwen's expression was one of utter shock, all of them thinking, it can't be?

They prepared to stop An Hua, but they were too late.

An Hua lastly stated, "His Holiness the Pope believes that General Chen Chou should be promoted to Divine General. He is the ideal candidate to oversee the Mount Song Army headquarters."

With these words, the entire room fell silent.

It was even more quiet than when it had been confirmed that Chen Changsheng was the maker of the Cinnabar Pill.

The truth behind that night's bloody incident was not actually that important to these great personages, and the Pope's whereabouts or his life were not something that they could touch.

Was not their goal in coming to the Mount Song Army headquarters precisely the position of Divine General?

Just what were the Pope's intentions? Did he want to use these words to seize it?

The Prince of Zhongshan's expression turned uglier and uglier.

It was still that deep and low voice that chose the perfect time to speak.

At the crucial moment, it was still that old fox Tianhai Chenwen that spoke.

"Those who should be punished will be punished, but... even His Holiness the Pope cannot involve himself in matters of the court, especially not in military affairs."

An Hua was very calm, not reacting in any way.

She had finished everything that the Pope had requested of her.

She did not know what would happen later on, but she believed that the Pope had made plans, and that these plans would appropriately settle things.

Just as she thought, a clamor erupted from outside the headquarters, followed by a voice.

"The Li Palace has never involved itself in matters of the court, but since there are people in the Imperial Court that dare to scheme against His Holiness the Pope, they must give an explanation.

"All the officers and soldiers of the Mount Song Army headquarters involved in this case must be arrested and given over to me so that I can bring them back to the capital for interrogation.

"Starting from today, Hanqiu City must be sealed. No one from the Zhu clan or the Emotion-Severing Sect is allowed to escape.

"As for the Tianhai clan, when I return to the capital, I will naturally call upon them to demand some people."

This was an incredibly gloomy voice, suffused with a boundless ruthlessness, and the words it spoke were even more unyielding.

After making these four demands, that person walked from the gate of the headquarters into the hall.

This person was dressed in a blue Daoist robe and carried a

chilling aura.

The Mount Song Army headquarters was heavily guarded, but nobody dared to stop him.

Because he was Linghai Zhiwang, the cruelest and most violent of the Sacred Hall archbishops of the Li Palace.

Because Archbishop An Lin and Daoist Baishi were at his side.

Because Mount Han seemed to rage, the stamping of hooves like thunder.

Three Prefects of the Orthodoxy had come to the Mount Song Army headquarters.

Two thousand escorting cavalry were right outside the town of Mount Song!

A crow alighted on a roof of a building deep within the army headquarters and cawed.

In the mountains, the white mantle of snow seemed particularly stark against the black cliffs.

A biting winter wind, speckled with bits of snow, ruffled the crow's black feathers.

Compared to the howling of the wind, it was so quiet beneath the roof that it could be described as a deathly stillness.

Chapter 803 – [Come, Soldiers and Warriors](#)

Three Sacred Hall archbishops and two thousand escorting cavalry made for an imposing and grand force.

Of course, this was the battlefield on the northern border, and the Mount Song Army headquarters commanded several thousand black-armored cavalry. If there was truly to be a battle, there was an army there that could fight it.

The problem was that Ning Shiwei and his most trusted subordinates and officers had all died that night in the mountains. The Divine General's seat in the Mount Song Army headquarters was empty. The several thousand black-armored cavalry and the even more numerous ordinary soldiers were all nervous, mystified as to whose orders they should follow.

Most importantly, even if there was someone who dared to command the troops, just who would dare bear the responsibility?

Divine General Cheng Tao and Divine General Jian Xi belonged to different factions, and Snowhold Pass and Blue Pass had never been able to see eye to eye. But now, with the Orthodoxy bringing down this formidable pressure, they had no mind for those old grudges. They looked in each other's eyes, seeking out help and support.

The Prince of Zhongshan and Tianhai Chenwen, however, did not choose this moment to glance at each other, as the possibility they had worried over and been wary of had already become reality.

Three years ago, Zhou Tong was executed via death of a thousand cuts on the snowy street, the previous Pope returned to the sea of stars, Chen Changsheng succeeded him, and then he vanished into the snow.

The capital quickly returned to tranquility, the situation steadily

proceeding forward. Many people had guessed that this had been an agreement between the Orthodoxy and the Imperial Court, between Chen Changsheng and Shang Xingzhou, student and teacher. As long as Chen Changsheng did not remain in the capital, nothing would happen.

The Pope was not in the Li Palace, but comprehending and cultivating in the world. This was the first time such a thing had ever happened in all of history.

Everyone knew that in reality, the Pope had been exiled.

But nobody would underestimate, much less ridicule, the young Pope for this reason.

In the eyes of the people, he was only willing to leave for the sake of the overarching situation, for the sake of all living beings, for the sake of resisting the demons.

In the next three years, Chen Changsheng truly did not return to the capital.

Other than when he had appeared once on the snowy battlefield of the north, no one even knew where he was.

In these three years, the Orthodoxy had also been extremely subdued.

The Li Palace had been extremely quiet, its famous stone pillars growing much older, the green ivy on its walls tarnished with dust.

The Grass Moon Hall was silent in the twilight, and while the cassias of the Pure Cassia Palace released their honey-like fragrance, no bees came to taste them. The Moss Institute was still gloomy, the Clearwater Tower exuded a tranquil porcelain-like beauty after being washed by rain, and many of the maple trees outside the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education had been moved to the Autumn Residence. Meanwhile, the Hall of the Heavenly Dao appeared incredibly desolate in the snow.

Daoist Baishi, Archbishop of the Hall of Literary Glory; Mao

Qiuyu, Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons; Daoist Siyuan, Archbishop of the Hall of Subjugation; An Lin, Archbishop of the Divine Edict; and Linghai Zhiwang, Archbishop of the Hall of Drifting Clouds; each kept guard over their respective treasure of the Orthodoxy and remained in their five halls, disregarding secular matters and rarely appearing before the public. Only the Grass Moon Hall remained without a master.

The Heavenly Dao Academy and the other five Ivy Academies strictly maintained their academy rules, and the Daoist churches in all the provinces and counties maintained an extremely low profile.

The All-School Martial Exhibition had faded into nothing, and even the Ivy Festival and Grand Examination had been paused for three years.

The southward invasion of the Demon Army was the public explanation given by the Imperial Court, the tension of the situation on the battlefield resulting in their temporary suspension, but everyone knew the real reason.

The Lingyan Pavilion had been rendered into a ruin by the Divine Empress and the Orthodoxy did not agree to opening the Li Palace. Under these circumstances, was there any meaning in holding the Grand Examination?

Only after that bloody night on a late autumn day in the snowy mountains and this winter day did the world finally hear some news about the Pope. At this moment, three Prefects of the Orthodoxy leading two thousand Orthodoxy cavalry suddenly left the capital and, unbeknownst to all, visited the Mount Song Army headquarters in the distant north.

What did they want to do?

This was what the Prince of Zhongshan and Tianhai Chenwen had been the wariest and most concerned about.

After three years, the Li Palace finally ceased its silence. The Orthodoxy was prepared to make its voice heard once more in the continent. What did this mean?

"Is His Holiness the Pope finally thinking about home?"

The Prince of Zhongshan stood up, a mocking tone in his voice. "If this means a civil war in the Great Zhou Dynasty, then this truly is splendid."

He had not hesitated to feign madness and eat feces so that the Divine Empress would spare his life. He was even willing to treat himself this viciously, so what did he have to be afraid of?

But his opponent today was also a very unyielding person.

Linghai Zhiwang was the currently the youngest of the Orthodoxy's Prefects, one of the scant few Sacred Hall archbishops to have a background in the military. If not for the fact that the Pope had called him back to the capital, he would already be a Divine General of the Great Zhou, his seniority even greater than Divine Generals Cheng Tao and Jian Xi.

In fact, if Chen Changsheng had not appeared, many people thought that either he or Daoist Siyuan had the highest chance of being the next Pope.

What did a person like that have to be afraid of? And he had just come from silently waiting in the gloomy and damp confines of the Moss Institute for a whole three years, which had not only failed to pacify his violent personality, but pushed it to the point of explosion.

"Your Highness is confused!"

Linghai Zhiwang's tough and callous voice echoed throughout the Mount Song Army headquarters.

Some people in the crowd and in the headquarters with somewhat shallow cultivations felt like a thunderclap had exploded next to their ears, and couldn't help but feel dizzy.

He stared into the Prince of Zhongshan's eyes and heavily intoned, "An assassination was attempted on His Holiness the Pope; should the Orthodoxy not respond?"

The Prince of Zhongshan, his gaze sharp, responded, "Secretly mobilizing the Orthodoxy cavalry and coming to the northern border is your response?"

"Correct." Linghai Zhiwang raised his chin and arrogantly proclaimed, "Because I must conduct an investigation."

An attempted assassination on the Pope was naturally a massive case, but just how was such a case investigated?

It was the four demands he had made before entering the Mount Song Army headquarters.

The Tianhai clan should hand over people!

No one from the Zhu clan or Emotion-Severing Sect should even think about running!

All the officers of the Mount Song Army headquarters should be arrested and brought back to the capital for the Li Palace to interrogate!

The Imperial Court must give a clear explanation!

If all of Linghai Zhiwang's demands were truly complied with, the Great Zhou would inevitably be thrown into upheaval.

The Prince of Zhongshan remained unswayed, impassively asking, "And if I agree to your four conditions?"

The matter in the snowy mountains had nothing to do with him, and although he had plotted to seize the Cinnabar Pill, he had not had the time to act.

"That should only be expected from the Imperial Court!" Linghai Zhiwang did not have any intention of backing down, harshly saying, "But before the Li Palace completely investigates this case, nobody should think about becoming commanding general of the

Mount Song Army headquarters, as this might affect my investigation."

Tianhai Chenwen sighed and asked, "Unless it is a person designated by His Holiness the Pope?"

He was naturally speaking of Chen Chou.

The Prince of Zhongshan's complexion turned even nastier as he exclaimed, "Truly preposterous!"

Linghai Zhiwang's face remained expressionless, cold and apathetic, just like his voice.

"His Holiness the Pope made the Cinnabar Pill out of pity for the living beings of the world, yet there are surprisingly people in the court presumptuous enough to think about seizing this treasure and even harming His Holiness. Do you really think that you need pay nothing for this? Moreover, what use is there if you agree to these four conditions? Does the Prince of Xiang also dare to agree?"

The Chinese title is '临兵斗者', which is a part of the saying '临兵斗者,皆阵列前行'. This saying translates to 'Descend soldiers and warriors, and array yourselves before me'. It originated as a sort of prayer in the Daoist text 'Baopuzi' by Ge Hong to invoke Daoist gods to protect the devotee as they climb a mountain.

Chapter 804 – Array Yourselves Before Me

Zhu Ye, Ning Shiwei, and Tianhai Zhanyi had all died that night in the snowy mountains, but truthfully, no one knew what they had done, and nobody should have been able to use them to implicate those personages within the capital. However, what they had wanted to do was no secret. Anyone would think it reasonable for the Orthodoxy to demand the appropriate payment from the Imperial Court.

"His Holiness is merciful, but my temperament has never been very good. If you do not agree to my demands, then this investigation will continue."

Linghai Zhiwang took a step forward and stared the Prince of Zhongshan in the eyes. "Your Highness, you'd best carefully think about whether you bear this burden."

The Prince of Zhongshan had a frigid visage, but he did not reply.

He was well aware that even if this investigation into the assassination of the Pope would not reach the Prince of Xiang, the Zhu clan, now bereft of the protection of a Divine Domain expert, truly might end up having all their property seized and their clan exterminated. Putting aside the thousand-year friendship between the Chen Imperial clan and the Zhu clan, simply the promise they had made to Zhu Luo three years ago made both him and the Prince of Xiang unwilling to see such a sight.

Tianhai Chenwen maintained his silence.

The crime of attempting to assassinate the Pope was truly too great. Once Tianhai Zhanyi's name was stained with this offense, it would be incredibly difficult to cleanse.

The present Tianhai clan was no longer what it once was. If the Li Palace really did come down on it with a thunderous momentum, the Tianhai clan really might not be able to resist.

In truth, investigating the case in this sort of manner was very unreasonable. All those involved were already dead, and besides Chen Changsheng's letter and the two witnesses, there was no proof. The Orthodoxy involving itself in government affairs and desiring to appoint the Divine General of the Mount Song Army headquarters was also very out of line, but this was just what the Orthodoxy had done, and they had made no attempts to conceal their aims.

Just why did that person have to be the Pope? Just like Linghai Zhiwang had said, the Imperial Court had to pay a price.

However, was this enough? Would this settle the matter?

"We will go to the Daoist church to await the result. The more quickly your discussion reaches its conclusion, the better."

Before Linghai Zhiwang took his leave, he said to the Prince of Zhongshan, "By the way, please tell His Highness the Prince of Xiang that all this is just the beginning."

Just as expected, it was just the beginning.

In the once-more-quiet Mount Song Army headquarters, the important personages were all occupied with their own thoughts, but they all coincidentally thought of that same phrase.

"F**k!"

The Prince of Zhongshan suddenly leapt up and pointed at the noses of the two Divine General as he cursed, "Are you all pigs? You even dared to snatch at his things! You even dared to move against him!"

At this moment, one of the prince's followers came to the door and lightly coughed.

Everyone understood, and they had no wish to endure the anger of the crazed prince, so they quickly bid farewell and left.

Before Tianhai Chenwen left, the Prince of Zhongshan grabbed

his sleeve. The Prince of Zhongshan whispered, "The Tang clan knew that the owner of the Cinnabar Pill was Chen Changsheng, and the palace also knew, yet I didn't know, the Prince of Xiang didn't know, and you didn't know. Don't you think there's something wrong with this?"

As he thought about how the Tang Seventeenth Master had also died in the mountains, how the Tang clan had sent no one to appear today, Tianhai Chenwen felt a wariness emerge in his heart.

"Many thanks for your warning."

After Tianhai Chenwen left, the prince's follower came up to the Prince of Zhongshan and handed him a letter.

There was nothing written on the envelope, but it was stamped with a most complicated seal.

The Prince of Zhongshan opened the letter. As he read its contents, he fell silent, his face turning gloomier and gloomier.

"Even the Qiushan clan knew... This old fox, did he calculate the time to send the letter?"

.....

.....

The investigation ultimately became a negotiation. The negotiations were still not finished, with the important figures departing with a brush of their sleeves, yet the contents of what was discussed spread like a wildfire throughout the town.

In a very short time, everyone in the town of Mount Song knew of what had happened that night in the mountains, and the crowd naturally could not help but consider the news rather absurd as they spread it.

The Divine General had actually plotted to harm His Holiness the Pope? And there were other factions involved? Those evildoers had

all ultimately died under His Holiness's divine punishment?

The most shocking news of all was naturally that the enigmatic master of the Cinnabar Pill was actually the Pope!

The Cinnabar Pill was actually refined from the righteous blood of the Pope's innately sacred body!

Three holy carriages were escorted out of the army headquarters by countless Orthodoxy cavalry, heading to the church on the west side of town.

The crowd along the streets parted like a tide, prostrating on the ground.

This was because three great figures of the Orthodoxy sat within these three holy carriages, but also because they were expressing their gratitude towards the benevolence of the Pope.

Some of the people had rather spirited eyes, allowing one to tell at a glance that they were cultivators. Others were dressed in the unique attire of array masters. The common trait was that they were all injured, great and small.

When the Orthodoxy carriages passed, those people silently kowtowed.

Some of these people had rather mixed expressions, but they also prostrated to the ground.

Those on the path of cultivation only prostrated to the heavens and earth, to their sovereign, to their parents, and to their teacher.

They were naturally not prostrating to the three Prefects of the Orthodoxy within the carriages, but to the Pope.

They had all once suffered severe injuries on the battlefield. If they had not been lucky enough to obtain a Cinnabar Pill, they would now be white bones buried in the yellow earth.

Only today did they realize that it was the Pope that had saved them, and that the Pope had used his own sacred blood. When they

thought of the Pope's compassion, how could they not be moved to tears? And when they thought about how the Pope's blood now flowed through their body, how could they not revere him?

Even those cultivating experts who belonged to other factions could not use their faction as an excuse to leave. They similarly prostrated on the ground.

.....

.....

The biting winter wind raised up the curtain of the window, yet failed to enter.

Just like the holy carriage of Holy Maiden Peak, the holy carriages of the Li Palace were also equipped with an array that kept out the wind, leaving the inside as warm as spring.

An Lin looked through the window at the crowds lining on the street. When she saw those cultivators and array masters, she slightly froze for a few moments.

After some time, she muttered to herself, "His Holiness the Pope seems different from the past."

This was an expression of emotion, and also a sigh that carried a very deep meaning.

As one of the Prefects of the Orthodoxy, the Archbishop of the Divine Edict, just what did her expression of emotion signify?

An Hua sat beside her and heard these words loud and clear. She very quickly came to understand what An Lin had meant.

The past was actually just three years ago.

Three years ago, Chen Changsheng was a calm but determined young Daoist. But now, his attitude towards the struggle over the Divine General of the Mount Song Army and the countless admiring gazes incited by the Cinnabar Pill all seemed to signify that both his view of the world and his methods had undergone

many changes.

"Auntie, you've misunderstood His Holiness. The matter of making public the truth of the Cinnabar Pill was my idea."

An Hua looked at Archbishop An Lin and earnestly said, "The actions of Saints naturally need to be made publicly known, or how else can the people be guided towards good?"

An Lin gazed at her niece and smiled, tenderly caressing her hair. She thought to herself, you currently deeply revere His Holiness, but how could you know that when that young Daoist first entered the capital, words like 'reverence' didn't even exist in his mind?

Chapter 805 – The Hard Journey

"Do you know how dangerous what you did today was?"

"I was carrying out His Holiness the Pope's edict; how could it be dangerous? And didn't Auntie and two archbishops hurry over?"

An Lin thought, this child cultivated in the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green for so many years, unaware of the world outside. It's only to be expected that she's still so innocent.

"The six halls of the Li Palace have been locked up for three years, apparently calm. In truth, we've been under massive pressure the entire time."

Her smile faded as she said calmly and seriously to An Hua, "In the end, the venerable Daoist master is still a Saint of the Orthodoxy, and now he is the supreme individual of the world. More and more people in the Orthodoxy are willing to chase after his footsteps. Even if His Holiness returns to the capital, he might not be able to take control over the situation."

"The Orthodoxy has only one Pope."

An Hua earnestly asked, "Auntie, you will always support His Holiness, right?"

"Three years ago, when His Holiness the Pope returned to the sea of stars, I and Mao Qiuyu and the others all received his final order, and we will naturally protect it to the end, but..." An Lin looked towards the wall of the carriage compartment in front of her, most likely looking at the holy carriage in front of theirs. "The venerable Daoist master is still His Holiness's teacher, so I do not know what other people might be thinking."

An Hua very seriously pondered this thought, then felt that she did not need to think about it, as in her heart, the Pope was the only god.

.....

.....

Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Baishi sat in the same holy carriage.

The two Orthodoxy Prefects never once looked at each other. It was very peaceful, even somewhat cold.

The cheers from outside, the praising of the divine and the sounds of kowtows did not cause the slightest ripple in their eyes.

Only when the chilling wind slapped a leaf against the window lattice did Daoist Baishi's expression finally relax a little.

"It seems that the three years His Holiness spent traveling the world were not a waste. His methods have become much shrewder."

He still did not turn his head to look at Linghai Zhiwang. His voice was so flat that it seemed to come from a corpse.

"As Archbishop of the Hall of Literary Glory, I actually didn't know the complete truth until last night. That His Holiness could conceal this matter so well from both you and me is truly worthy of admiration."

Chen Changsheng naturally had a way to communicate with the Li Palace, or else the three Prefects of the Orthodoxy would not have been able to bring two thousand Orthodoxy cavalry to the Mount Song Army headquarters with such thunderous momentum. The problem was that Daoist Baishi had no idea what this communication method was, and in his view, Linghai Zhiwang also should not know of it.

Everyone knew that in the past, Linghai Zhiwang's relationship with Chen Changsheng and Orthodox Academy was utterly terrible.

If not for Chen Changsheng, he would probably be Pope.

Daoist Baishi's two statements could be understood as an expression of emotion, of praise towards the Pope's intelligence,

but they could also be understood as a provocation.

Linghai Zhiwang's face remained expressionless, just as it was the majority of the time.

When the second withered leaf slapped against the window lattice, he finally opened his mouth, but he was not answering Daoist Baishi's moved statements.

"Why is it that nobody from the Tang clan ever showed up?"

This change in topic was too sudden and stiff, so the question sounded somewhat cold.

Daoist Baishi slightly frowned. "I don't know."

Linghai Zhiwang took his gaze off the window and turned to Daoist Baishi.

He turned his head so slowly that he seemed like a puppet, and one could almost hear the creaking of his spine. Yet he was also like a sword slowly being drawn from its sheath.

"Even before Mu Jiushi was banished from the Li Palace, I never thought of her as a member of our Orthodoxy, so I've always been the youngest among us. I still have a lot of time, so I can wait. Don't give me any nonsense about how Chen Changsheng is younger than me, and stop showing me this dead face with that holy and unthinking expression."

Linghai Zhiwang stared into Daoist Baishi's eyes. "I've never liked this Pope of ours, but if he suffers two assassinations in a row, I will be many times angrier than I am right now, as this is a challenge to the Li Palace, this is my disgrace. And when I truly get angry, you should be well aware of how I act."

After saying this, he turned his head back to the window. It was like nothing had happened, nothing had been said.

.....

.....

The carriages of the Orthodoxy did not wait at Mount Song for too long.

This was because the imperial envoy, the Prince of Zhongshan, and other important personages did not need too long to reach a conclusion and agree to the Li Palace's demand.

Commanding officer Chen Chou of Seven Li Xi's roaming cavalry had become the new Divine General of the Mount Song Army headquarters.

This news shocked the people within the town of Mount Song, especially those officers who knew of Chen Chou's background and why he had been demoted.

As for the reason behind this move, it shocked even people in many more places, like Blue Pass, Snowhold Pass, Xunyang City, and even the capital and Luoyang.

The Pope who had vanished for three years had actually been on the battlefields on the north this entire time. He had never forgotten the human soldiers that were fighting with the Demon Army on the blood-soaked battlefields, and he did not mind consuming his life and true blood to make the Cinnabar Pill and save countless lives. And then someone had attempted to assassinate him in the mountains.

After remaining silent for three years, the Li Palace suddenly made its voice heard, using this matter to unflinchingly snatch that position in the Mount Song Army headquarters. And what did this mean?

The exiled Pope seemed on the verge of making his return to the public eye, but did that also mean that he wanted to go back to the capital?

.....

.....

Many high mountains lay behind the town of Mount Song, and

countless paths wove between the mountains. A crude pavilion or grass hut would often be constructed at the bends of these mountain paths.

In the bustling human world of the south, these grass huts or pavilions might be called departure houses or departure pavilions, used to prolong the time before separation and feel an even greater sorrow from parting.

Here, however, these pavilions and grass huts were only used to avoid the rain and take a break.

On the battlefield, man might ascend to heaven forever and make the departure that was death. It was very difficult to feel much sorrow over parting while still alive.

Luo Bu used two fingers to hold a small wine pot while he gazed at the fog-shrouded town of Mount Song. He was quiet, seemingly thinking about something.

Chen Changsheng and Nanke stood at his side. They followed his gaze but realized that they couldn't see anything.

They had left Sloping Cliff Horse Farm and come to this place. Based on their earlier plans, it was now time to part.

The mountain path here split in three, heading south, north, and west.

The road north led down the mountain to the town of Mount Song, and further north than that were the desolate snowy plains where one might see the figures of the Demon race's wolf cavalry at any time.

The road south led across the mountains and across a thousand li of grassy meadows to Xunyang City.

The road west went around the mountains, crossing the Siya River and countless hills. In two days' time, one would see the outline of Hanqiu City.

Further south of Hanqiu City was Wenshui.

Chen Changsheng wanted to go to Wenshui.

On the other hand, Luo Bu needed to go to Mount Song. After delivering his military seal, he would take his leave.

Would he feel a little reluctant after fighting on the snowy plains for nearly five years?

Chapter 806 – The Rare Sight of an Autumn City in the Spring Wind

After downing a mouthful of strong alcohol, Luo Bu remained expressionless.

Looking at him, Chen Changsheng felt somewhat reluctant to part.

"Then... we're going?" he said to Luo Bu.

Luo Bu waved the wine pot in the air, indicating that he knew. Still, he said nothing.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat unhappy, thinking to himself, even if you're not willing to speak because you want to maintain your style, shouldn't you at least offer me a drink of alcohol before parting?

In truth, Luo Bu had been acting rather strange these past few days. After their chat by the stream over alcohol, Luo Bu had subtly adjusted his attitude towards Chen Changsheng.

It was clear that he was no longer willing to converse any further with Chen Changsheng, much less about intimate subjects. However, he also had no hostility. Instead, it felt like he was deliberately keeping a distance, wanting to be a stranger.

But he was also not completely a stranger, as whether it was when eating medicine or feeding the horses on the fields, Chen Changsheng could always feel Luo Bu watching from a distance.

This sort of watching felt more like observing.

Just why was this?

Chen Changsheng shook his head and stopped thinking about it. He could only consider Luo Bu a strange person and take Nanke and start on the mountain path.

From start to end, until his and Nanke's figures vanished into the pine forests, Luo Bu never once turned his head.

He looked down at the town of Mount Song while he drank. He wasn't so much sending off Chen Changsheng but rather sending off himself.

After finishing off all the wine, Luo Bu finally stood up and began to make his way down the mountain.

He did not go straight to the Mount Song Army headquarters to make his report, but chose to first enter a very unremarkable tavern.

He had his empty wine pot filled and then seated himself at a table by the window. After ordering a plate of fried beans, he peered out the window.

Three of his fingers fell on the plate and, without looking, accurately snatched up two fried beans on each trip for his mouth to slowly chew on.

As the sun approached noon, its light pierced through the thick clouds and drenched the streets of Mount Song, clearly illuminating the faces of the people walking about.

Chen Chou, the newly appointed Divine General of the Mount Song Army, was sent off from the army headquarters' main gate by his subordinates. Mounting a horse, he began his first patrol.

As he looked at the clearly taller and more erect figure of his old friend, Luo Bu laughed and raised his wine cup to congratulate him, praying in his heart that he would not suffer an early death.

At dusk, the sunlight became much dimmer, the rays of the setting sun like flames, setting ablaze the buildings on the street and the thoughts of the people.

He had already consumed three plates of fried beans and four pots of wine. Luo Bu's eyes were squinting more and more, but not because he was drunk. Rather, he had seen the person that he had

wanted to see.

Of course, the reason he wanted to see those people was that he didn't want to see those people.

Those people were from his clan, and also from the Wenshui Tangs, the Wu clan, and the Mutuo clan.

No other than him would have been able to pick these people out of the crowd, and so naturally no one else noticed that those people had left Mount Song and headed west.

Luo Bu continued to drink for a very long time. Yet his eyes were not overtaken by intoxication; on the contrary, they became brighter and brighter. After this long session of drinking, he finally sighed and stood. He sought a bowl of clean water from the tavernkeeper and then very carefully washed his face and beard. Then, singing a song that had never been heard in the north, he left Mount Song and headed west.

Chen Changsheng's injuries were still far from cured, but he could now walk, so he had refused the Dragonhorse offered by Sloping Cliff Horse Farm. With Nanke's help, his speed was not slow, and it was actually many times faster than a normal trade caravan. Leaving Mount Song and walking the mountain path, they very quickly left the mountains behind them.

On the dusk of the second day, he and Nanke reached Hanqiu City.

As they walked along the official road towards the city before them, he noticed that the forest lining the road showed signs of damage. This was especially the case for the forest on his left-hand side, which appeared somewhat messy, and after careful observation, he could see many young shrubs and willows. It was obvious that this place had suffered some devastating damage a few years ago.

He froze, recalling that a few years ago, he, Zhexiu, and many

other people had passed through these woods to enter the Garden of Zhou.

At the time, a rainbow had traveled vast distances from the south to fall here, and the entrance to the Garden of Zhou had lain in that ethereal courtyard behind the forest.

At present, the entrance to the Garden of Zhou was on his wrist, in that black stone, and the key to the Garden of Zhou was also no longer at the peak of the Mount Li Sword Sect, but was now his thoughts.

He recalled many memories from that time.

At that time, Zhu Luo had been sitting in a pavilion, his long hair draped over his shoulders, overflowing with an ancient aura. His unparalleled arrogance meant that no one dared to approach him.

At that time, Mei Lisha had been sitting in a carriage, silent and indifferent, not speaking a single word. Like an old plum tree, he carried a certain type of aura about him.

Now, both Mei Lisha and Zhu Luo were dead, but many of the other people from that time were still alive.

Chen Changsheng turned to glanced at Nanke.

He had met Nanke for the first time in the Garden of Zhou. Nanke had been a cold and callous Demon Princess then, carrying out Black Robe's order to incite internal strife between the human cultivators in the Garden of Zhou. At the same, she had also been seeking an opportunity to kill Xu Yourong, Zhexiu, and Qi Jian. She had been his most frightening enemy.

Now, she was an imbecilic and utterly ignorant little girl. She only knew to follow him, protect him, and wait on him.

"When you wake up, I don't know if you'll remember these days," he ruefully said as he looked at Nanke.

Nanke held a corner of his sleeve, her eyes still dull as they

looked towards Hanqiu City in front of them. She was utterly unaware of what he was thinking.

It was plain to see that she had clean forgotten her experiences in the Garden of Zhou.

Chen Changsheng could not help but sigh upon seeing her appearance.

On that night in the mountains, she had even taken the risk of having her soul break out of her body to save his life, so he naturally had to fulfill the promise. But he didn't even know if he could cure her. And moreover, just as he had ruefully sighed about, if he really did cure her, would she still remember these days after waking up? Would she kill him?

.....

.....

The closer they got to Hanqiu City, the denser the forest lining the road became. More and more willows appeared, symbolizing very well the flavor of this city.

Yes, every city had its own unique flavor. The flavor of the capital rested on the verdancy of the Mausoleum of Books while the flavor of Luoyang rested on its city walls. The flavor of Hanqiu City was its willow trees.

Zhu Luo had loved willow trees, so the Myriad Willows Garden lay on the outskirts of Hanqiu City while myriad willows had also been planted in the city.

Zhu Luo had long since become shards of stars in the Mausoleum of Books, a wisp of smoke that had left no trace, but Hanqiu City was still as it was in the past, with many of his marks still left on the city.

From a certain perspective, Hanqiu City had the surname of Zhu. The Zhu clan and the Emotion-Severing Sect possessed supreme status and unfathomable strength within this city. But Chen

Changsheng was not at all concerned that he might encounter something here, as no one should have known of his whereabouts. More importantly, Zhu Ye was already dead, leaving the Zhu clan without any sort of outstanding individuals.

As expected, he and Nanke very smoothly entered Hanqiu City. The soldiers and disciples dressed in the sword uniform of the Emotion-Severing Sect had clearly not shaken off the shock that came from news of their master's death. They seemed very vigilant on the surface, but their eyes were brimming with a bewilderment and unease towards the future.

Chapter 807 – One Cannot Sleep Well

Lodging Amongst the Willows

The Willow Lodge was Hanqiu City's finest inn. It was adjacent to the most beautiful lake within the city and was surrounded by a forest of ancient willows. It was a most beautiful and secluded place in the spring and summer, but in midwinter, when the lake was frozen and the willows were bare, one might feel rather somber and mournful when looking out the window and viewing the scenery under the starlight.

Hanqiu City at night was incredibly tranquil, so quiet it almost seemed like a graveyard. Wang Po was still in the south and had not returned to Tianliang County, but in the view of the Zhu clan, many changes in the world happened very abruptly, catching people somewhat unprepared, just like their current hard-pressed state.

Nanke's voice roused Chen Changsheng from his thoughts. He turned around and sat on the bed.

Nanke took off his shoes and then placed his feet in a basin. Lowering her head, she began to very seriously wash them.

The temperature of the water in the basin was just right: not scalding, but also not so cool that it might start to feel cold after a while. She had probably tested it herself just a few moments ago, just as she had done in those nights at Sloping Cliff Horse Farm.

When Chen Changsheng was unconscious, and also in that period when it was still difficult for him to move, Nanke had been the one that fed and washed him.

He had tried many times to refuse her, but he had failed to convince her each time, just like tonight.

"I've almost completely recovered. Wouldn't it be okay if I do these things myself in the future?"

"Not okay."

Nanke did not even raise her head.

She currently remembered nothing, only that Chen Changsheng was the most important person in the world to her.

So she should serve him well, ensuring his health and survival so that he could recover as quickly as possible.

Chen Changsheng thought, then very sincerely said, "I'm not sure... if I can cure your illness."

"But only you can cure it, right?"

Nanke raised her head and stared into his eyes.

Because the divine soul had broken out of her body, she no longer had that wide space between her eyes, but her eyes were still somewhat dull.

When she focused her gaze on a person or thing, it was truthfully rather frightening.

But Chen Changsheng was already used to it.

After washing him, Nanke very naturally opened the luggage and laid bedding on the floor. She did not sleep, however, but very naturally took off her upper garment and sat down in front of Chen Changsheng.

In the last few nights before they left Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, Chen Changsheng had begun attempting to cure her.

Even as an imbecilic girl, Nanke still vaguely felt that baring her naked body in front of a man was not good.

But she was already used to it.

Chen Changsheng's finger flitted past the stone pearl, his spiritual sense entering the garden to remove his dagger.

Immediately after, he extracted a metal needle from the Vault Sheath.

True essence poured in and the tip of the needle began to vibrate. It then pierced into Nanke's seemingly tender, but actually incredibly sturdy skin, probing into her meridians.

In these past few years, he had cured Luoluo's illness, cured Xuanyuan Po's injuries, and treated Zhexiu for an extended period of time. His ability to detect the smallest details through the true essence he poured into his needle was now far stronger than it had been when he first entered the capital, but he was still not confident that he could cure Nanke's illness.

Because Nanke was not of the Demi-human race, but of the Demon race.

Through his treatments over the last few nights, Chen Changsheng had developed a deeper understanding of the demon body, and the more he understood, the more incredulous he was.

On the surface, the bodies of the demons did not differ much from the bodies of humans, especially for someone like Nanke, who was from the Imperial clan. However, there were several aspects in which they were as different as night and day.

These differences mostly rested in the meridians, Ethereal Palace, Qi openings, and sea of consciousness.

Demons had meridians, but not Qi openings, and certainly no Ethereal Palace.

Most importantly, a demon's sea of consciousness, unlike humans and demi-humans, was not a sea formed from thoughts, but a fog of light.

The question was this: was the light in this fog made from shards of thought, or a sort of objective existence?

Chen Changsheng was very curious about this light, which seemed barely discernible yet also existing in every time and place. For some vague reason, he felt like he had seen it before.

Regretfully, although Nanke had opened her mind as much as

possible, Chen Changsheng was currently still unable to enter the depths of her mind, as he was concerned that his intrusion might render Nanke a complete imbecile or just kill her. Thus, he was not able to see the true appearance of that light.

.....

.....

Zhu Ye's remains had already been secretly transported to Hanqiu City, but they had not been buried. The Zhu clan and the Emotion-Severing Sect did not know how to handle them, as his remains were in a terrible state, seemingly gnawed on by some wild beast. However, the cold and cheerless Hanqiu City was already on the verge of becoming a graveyard.

Even if the venerable Daoist master and the Prince of Xiang would continue protecting the Zhu clan for the sake of the friendship they had with Zhu Luo, how could any noble clan without a true expert last forever in this vicious world? And everyone knew that a day would come in which Wang Po would return to Hanqiu City and demand what he had lost.

The Myriad Willows Garden outside Hanqiu City seemed to have known of today's situation ahead of time. It had already been burned several years ago, burning some paper money for itself in advance.

Not far from the Myriad Willows Garden was the ancestral tomb of the Zhu clan. Only the heads of the Zhu clan and elders who had made extraordinary contributions had the right to be buried here.

The starlight tonight was brilliant, revealing the tombs and gravestones with startling clarity. If one carefully read the words on these gravestones, one would be able to understand the entire history of the Zhu clan and the Emotion-Severing Sect.

A thin and small figure hunched over as it used its two hands to dig, its mouth constantly muttering something.

Starlight fell on its face. Its crooked eyes, mouth and nose were even more horrifying than all the gravestones added together.

The saliva coming from its mouth gave off an unbearable stench, even more putrid than the corpse fluids from all the excavated tombs.

Yes, this small and hunchbacked man was digging up tombs, his long and slender fingers caked with mud and decayed flesh. For some reason, they were razor-sharp, swiftly digging up tomb after tomb. In just one hour, the seventeen tombs of the Zhu clan ancestral tomb were completely excavated.

Whether the result was a rotten corpse or white bones, they were the finest of harvests to the hunchbacked man.

His eyes glowed and even more saliva dripped down as a most vague and incomprehensible voice came out of his mouth. Only through the most attentive listening could one understand the general meaning.

"Your Zhu clan is about to perish.

"So give your grudges and souls to me; I will help you kill your foes."

The hunchbacked man suddenly crossed his legs and sat down in a lotus position, his palms facing the stars as he closed his eyes in meditation.

He was clearly using the most traditional Daoist technique of the Orthodoxy. Under the starlight, he appeared dignified, even somewhat divine.

But his mouth and nose were askew, his eyes unable to completely close, making him seem very ugly.

The most traditional divine art of the Orthodoxy, the most beautiful starlight, and an ugly hunchbacked man.

This sort of stark contrast imbued the scene with a comical and

absurd feeling, but also an inexplicable horror.

Chapter 808 – Morning Light, Kitchen Fog, a Freak

Countless strands of Qi arose from the ruins of the Myriad Willows Garden and the scattered graves.

These strands of Qi were very faint, yet they also carried a chill that could seep into the bones. It was different from the Qi of demon experts, and also different from the Qi of Black Frost Dragons, seeming both more sinister and foul.

The experts from the successive generations of the Zhu clan buried in this tomb were mostly upper level Star Condensation experts. Its two Divine Domain experts, one of them being Zhu Luo, only had cenotaphs, but they had still left behind a few shards of their souls. As for that sinister and foul feeling, it came from the poisons formed on the corpses and bones as they decayed.

Even the starlight seemed to dim for a moment.

These strands of Qi gradually congregated around that short, hunchbacked man, drawn into a jade bottle placed in front of him by the divine power he was releasing.

To use the most traditional of divine arts to collect the most sinister and foul of corpse poisons—such a feat could not even be found in the records stored within the Li Palace, as this sort of method was far too ancient. Only a few places might have continued to pass it down, such as a few of the sects belonging to the southern Orthodoxy faction, Holy Maiden Peak or the Longevity Sect...

And if an important member of the Tang clan were present, they might be able to recognize that the great array that was the capital's Imperial Design shared a few aspects with it.

As time went on, this sinister Qi grew fainter and fainter, all of it being drawn into the small jade bottle.

The hunchbacked dwarf opened his eyes. As he gazed at the jade bottle, his eyes shone with greed and excitement.

He carefully brought the bottle up to his nose and sniffed. It clearly exuded no fragrance, yet he seemed to become intoxicated.

The small jade bottle was half full of some sort of clear liquid akin to water. However, it was also much more viscous, making it seem like some type of honey.

Fish dew and pine resin were both dews produced after death, as was the liquid in the bottle: the dew of the Yellow Springs.

The night deepened and the starlight regained its brilliance. The tomb outside the Myriad Willows Garden was returned to its former appearance—no one would be able to tell that this place had once been excavated. Similarly, no one would know that the souls and corpse poisons of the experts of the Zhu clan had been gathered up through an inconceivable method.

The hunchbacked dwarf returned to that inn called the Willow Lodge.

He was already short, and as he was also bending his body, lowering his head, and wearing a black hat low over his head, it was simply impossible to see his face.

After leaving the sect, he had lived and traveled in the wilderness, very rarely meeting others, as he had an inferiority complex.

Over the past few days, he had learned about this way of dressing himself up, making him somewhat more content.

He had learned it from that important demon figure he had seen that night on the snowy plains.

He entered the inn through a side door and made his way to the kitchen in the back. Like a dog, he squatted by the window, looking at the sky over the courtyard wall, awaiting the morning light.

The cutting of onions and the reprimands of the chef came from the window and then were covered in fog.

He rose and entered the kitchen. He examined the labels placed on the lunchboxes and found his target. Taking out the jade bottle, he dripped a few drops onto the plate.

Today, the Willow Lodge was serving Hanqiu City's famous jade tofu for breakfast. The drops of liquid from the jade bottle atop it looked just like honey, making the food seem even more appetizing.

The lunchboxes were very quickly brought out of the kitchen and delivered to their corresponding rooms so that the guests would be in a good mood after waking.

The hunchbacked man returned to his position squatting down outside the window. As he saw the sky brighten and thought about what was about to happen in a short while, his eyes squinted in delight.

And yet, nothing happened whatsoever.

The morning sun had already leaped over the horizon and had even risen over the short wall in front of him, yet the inn remained peaceful. He could hear the sounds of washing, chatting, and even the clinking of money in the waiter's pocket. The only thing he could not hear was the sound of the hearts of that pair coming to a stop.

The warm rays of the morning shone upon his ugly face and his seemingly rust-covered pupils constricted into tiny grains.

He once more returned to the kitchen. Seeing the lunchbox carried by the waiter, he confirmed that the jade tofu on the plate had been completely eaten.

He very slowly tilted his head, very confused. He scooted up and sniffed the remaining liquid on the plate, confirming that there was no smell.

For some reason, the waiter bizarrely did not appear to see him.

He muttered to himself, "They didn't die? How can this be?"

The waiter suddenly heard a voice come out of the air beside him and was given a fright, almost crying out.

The reason he did not cry was that a hand covered in black fur and scales had suddenly shot out of the air and clasped his throat.

The hunchbacked dwarf revealed himself and looked impassively upon the waiter, his eyes containing no human emotion.

The waiter had never seen something so ugly and evil. He struggled in fear, but was unable to escape.

The hunchback thought, then very carefully dripped a single drop of the liquid in the jade bottle onto the waiter's face.

The waiter's body instantly went rigid, ceasing to struggle. A black spot appeared on his face that rapidly spread over his entire body.

In a very brief span of time, a living human had become a lifeless, pitch-black sculpture: dead.

The hunchbacked dwarf observed the waiter's transformation and thought to himself, there's no problem! His face scrunched together, making him seem terribly vexed.

A slightly chilly morning wind blew in from the window, scattering the remaining fog in the kitchen and blowing the waiter's corpse into innumerable wisps of black smoke.

In the light of the morning sun, this black smoke quickly turned transparent and impossible to see.

.....

.....

Nanke had already finished packing.

Chen Changsheng stood by the window. Under the morning sun,

Hanqiu City finally seem to be a little livelier.

But soon after, he felt the passing of a life.

He did not know where this feeling came from and why he could suddenly feel it.

Countless living beings dwelled in this word. At every moment, lives were being born and passing away.

That he could sense it meant that the passing of this life was related to him.

He looked away from the window and towards Nanke.

Nanke just so happened to be raising her head, and their gazes met in the air. Both of them saw the wariness in each other's minds.

Nanke's gaze moved once more, in the end resting on the floorboards in front of her.

Through the floorboards, on the first floor, in a room on the right-hand side.

With a thought from Chen Changsheng, countless sword glows appeared in the room.

The morning light coming in from the window instantly lost its color and brilliance.

Countless sword intents swiftly and forcefully descended. In a flash, the wooden floorboards had quietly vanished, transformed into motes of dust in the morning light.

Chen Changsheng and Nanke landed on the ground.

Just as their feet touched the ground, the stone wall in front of them began to crumble away, dispersing into the surroundings as the finest powder.

The wall disappeared, revealing the scene behind it.

Chopped onions were still resting on the chopping board, and

steam was still billowing out of the iron pot underneath the steaming tray.

It was obvious that this was a kitchen.

In the center of the kitchen stood a freak.

It turns out that attempting to poison someone with the most toxic blood in the world and someone with the holiest blood in the world isn't that great of a plan.

Chapter 809 – He Comes from the Yellow Springs

The reason a person is called a 'freak' is naturally that many aspects of that person differ from normal.

This person was very short. On the surface, Nanke appeared like a little girl of twelve or thirteen, but this person was shorter than Nanke by two heads.

This person was very ugly. No matter how beautiful the morning light was, it could only engender disgust when it shone on that seemingly randomly assembled face.

This person's back bulged upwards, indicating that he was probably a hunchback.

This person was dressed in black. His clothes had been washed until they were very clean, but for some strange reason, one could still smell some stinking odor.

Most people who saw such a thin, short, deformed, and stinking person would first feel loathing. After calming down, they might feel some pity or sympathy.

Chen Changsheng did not feel any of these things.

The moment he saw this person, his sense of wariness instantly soared.

It was the same feeling he had gotten when he first saw Zhou Tong standing under the crabapple tree in the alley of the Northern Military Department.

He felt that he was seeing an unreasonable, unpersuadable, undilutable, and perfect evil.

This person's evil was subtly different from Zhou Tong's evil, even more sinister and foul.

"Who are you?" Chen Changsheng asked the freak.

The person's ugly face showed a hint of anxiety.

Because the morning light was too bright and he had forgotten to cover his face with a hat.

He had been seen, making him feel inferior, and once more stirring in him a desire to destroy the world.

The moment he thought about destroying the world, the freak felt much more at peace and began to smile.

This freak's smile was also very freakish. The moment he smiled, the corners of his lips peeled back, revealing the terrifying sight that was those messy and sharp teeth that seemed more appropriate in the mouth of a beast.

"Since I can't kill you in secret, I can only try and see if I can't kill you right here."

This person's voice was also very unpleasant, as grating as two broken shards of porcelain being constantly rubbed against each other.

After saying this, he extended both his hands and made a gesture towards Chen Changsheng.

In the bright morning light, one could clearly see that his two hands were covered all over in fur and scales, making them seem rather repulsive.

Chen Changsheng did not pay any attention to this detail but to the gesture formed by the hands.

He had never seen this gesture used in reality, but as he was well-versed in the Daoist Canon, he had once seen it in an ancient Daoist scripture.

This was a most traditional Daoist array hand seal, an archaic technique that had ceased to be passed down in the Orthodoxy for many years.

Neither the Li Palace nor Holy Maiden Peak still taught this sort of technique.

This person exuded a fair and harmonious, even divine Qi.

But black Qi was gathering around his hands, lightning bolts flashing within while a foul and evil smell gushed forth.

Using the most traditional and ancient divine arts of the Orthodoxy to drive the most sinister and evil of attacks—what sort of monster was this?

Chen Changsheng's eyes narrowed as his right hand gripped the hilt at his waist.

It seemed like this impromptu battle was about to begin, but nobody expected what happened next.

The hunchbacked freak suddenly glanced upwards and then bellowed in exasperation, "Why do you have so many helpers!"

After saying this, he suddenly blurred, intending to retreat out the window.

But escaping in front of Chen Changsheng and Nanke could never be so easy.

Countless sword intents flitted around the kitchen, sealing off all escape routes.

In a clear stream of light, Nanke vanished from the ground.

Chen Changsheng was not worried that the freak might escape. At such short distances, no one was faster than Nanke, even if her two wings had oddly vanished. Yet... what happened next completely surpassed his imagination.

The moment Nanke vanished, so did the freak.

Countless streams of wind suddenly stirred. The steam gushing out from the iron pot was parted into innumerable strands while the rays of light coming in from the window incessantly twinkled.

It was evident that the two were currently traveling through the room at such high speeds that they were not visible to the naked eye.

Even with her lightning-bolt-esque speed, Nanke was still unable to seize the freak.

The wariness in Chen Changsheng's mind continued to intensify and he slightly strengthened the grip of his right hand on the hilt.

With a few shinks, several extremely distinct lines appeared on the roof beams, several swords stabbing through the morning light at a certain location.

A pained and furious howl shattered the air.

The freak was forced to reveal himself. His right shoulder bore a wound, with putrid blood slowly seeping out.

Several dark green rays of light howled through the air, grabbing at the freak's throat. They were Nanke's fingers.

Rip! The freak's clothes suddenly burst apart.

Two gray silhouettes appeared behind him, moving his body with unimaginable speed to the other side of the room, avoiding Nanke's attack.

The bulge behind his back had not been because he was a hunchback, but because he was hiding a pair of wings!

There were no feathers on these wings, just two disgusting gray lumps of flesh, but they flapped with incredible speed.

The gray wings beat madly, gusting up reeking winds. With a boom, the freak flew straight into the stove!

In a frenzy of swords, the stove was instantly annihilated, but the person had already disappeared.

Chen Changsheng and Nanke stood next to the ruins of the stove, looking silently at the hole in the floor.

Nanke drew back her spiritual sense and said, "It leads underground and is filled with impurity. I don't know how he passed through it."

Seeing this scene and hearing Nanke's words, Chen Changsheng fell into deep thought.

He had read a similar description in that ancient Daoist scripture as well.

It was a story from a very, very long time ago.

Tens of thousands of years ago, there was a Pope who, in search of the Grand Liberation Realm, became enlightened to an extremely sinister cultivation method. This was to separate oneself from one's vulgar thoughts and desires, creating an opposite self. By observing oneself, one would be able to comprehend the ultimate principles of the world and then, with a single strike, obtain true peace.

That Pope had made an incredible amount of preparations beforehand, but he did not realize that the evil soul was even more sinister and terrifying than expected. Using the impure Qi of the world, it matured at an unimaginable pace, and when he finally wanted to execute it, he did not completely succeed, and even suffered a backlash from the evil soul. He had no other means: when his soul was on the verge of being completely contaminated, he borrowed the will of twelve sages in the Great Hall of Light to forcefully kill both himself and that evil soul.

Just like that, the most knowledgeable Pope of unfathomable cultivation died.

This Daoist technique, given the name Corpse-Beheading, was naturally forbidden by the Orthodoxy and gradually was lost in the long river of history.

Who could have expected that this Daoist technique would re-emerge before him today?

Countless years ago, before that Pope departed, he had said to the archbishops of the Li Palace, "If the corpse beheading does not succeed, the Yellow Springs will appear."

Could that monster be the Yellow Springs?

Chapter 810 – Beneath the Ancient Scholar Tree, Have No Other Thoughts

The three thousand scriptures of the Daoist Canon had records of that period of history, but it did not contain a specific description of that Daoist technique known as Corpse-Beheading. Chen Changsheng found it impossible to confirm whether or not that monster was from the legendary Yellow Springs. He wrote two letters, one to the Li Palace in the capital and the other to Holy Maiden Peak in the south, hoping that these two places could gather more information.

That monster had clearly come to kill him, but he didn't know what that monster had done, or even if he had had time to do it yet.

Putting aside the monster's mysterious origins, Chen Changsheng had already mentally prepared himself for the assassination attempt itself.

The message Linghai Zhiwang had asked the Prince of Zhongshan to pass to the Prince of Xiang in the Mount Song Army headquarters was a clear expression of the Orthodoxy's stance to the entire continent.

Chen Changsheng was well aware of the situation such a stance would put him in.

This was just the beginning.

It was just like all those things Su Li encountered when he was heavily injured on the snowy plains of the demon domain and began his long journey back to the south.

Chen Changsheng was currently the Pope, but that didn't mean that the number of people who wanted to kill him was smaller than those that had wanted to kill Su Li.

It was obvious that somebody already knew that he was in

Hanqiu City.

But he was confident that the Zhu clan would not act.

Just as expected, when he and Nanke left the Willow Lodge and walked towards the southern gate of Hanqiu City, they felt several people watching them from the shadows, but no one appeared.

Only when he walked past a store selling perfume did he meet someone completely unexpected.

This person was dressed like a scholar, his delicate features unable to conceal his prideful aura. There was also an inexplicable smear of happiness on his face.

He was called Bie Tianxin, and he was dressed as a scholar because this was how his father often appeared in public.

His father was Bie Yanghong and his mother was Wuqiong Bi.

Several years ago, in the capital, Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan had led the new faction of the Orthodoxy in promoting the All-School Martial Exhibition so as to suppress the Orthodox Academy.

Urged on by the Orthodoxy's new faction and the Tianhai clan, countless cultivation experts went into Hundred Flowers Lane and issued challenges towards the Orthodox Academy.

Bie Tianxin had been one of these people, and he was the most arrogant and unbridled of the lot.

However, his father sent a letter, after which Su Moyu left the Mausoleum of Books and did not return to the Li Palace Academy, but registered as a student of the Orthodox Academy. Many people knew that the standpoints of those two powerful figures were different, so this challenge naturally faded into nothing.

After that, Bie Tianxin no longer saw Chen Changsheng, only heard about him through the mouths of storytellers and saw his name on decrees and divine edicts. So now, far away from the

capital in Hanqiu City, when he once more saw that rather ordinary, unfamiliar, yet unforgettable face, he couldn't help but freeze.

He had come to Hanqiu City to represent the elders of his clan in discussing a few matters with the Zhu clan, but more importantly, to see someone. He had never expected that he would see Chen Changsheng here.

His heart began to beat faster and his lips felt dry, as he was both shocked and nervous. The entire continent wanted to know Chen Changsheng's whereabouts, so why did he just have to meet him in Hanqiu City? What would happen next? What should he do? Did he need to step forward on his own and pay his respects?

As these thoughts were racing through his head, Chen Changsheng had already walked past him.

Chen Changsheng had seen Bie Tianxin and also recognized him, but he acted as if he had not.

In contrast, Nanke gave Bie Tianxin a rather curious glance.

.....

.....

Deep within an extremely secluded mansion of Hanqiu City, Bie Tianxin described his encounter with Chen Changsheng. His brow was slightly furrowed in irritation.

He was speaking to a young girl. She had a moving appearance and two slightly blushing cheeks. She looked rather cute, perhaps because she was currently sipping on some wine.

"Are you afraid of him?"

The girl's voice was very soft and gentle, but her tone was not. Rather, it carried a faint scorn and a seemingly innate aloofness.

This was just a simple question, and it seemed to show little respect for both Bie Tianxin and Chen Changsheng. She had asked

if Bie Tianxin was afraid of Chen Changsheng, but she had also only called Chen Changsheng 'him'.

Bie Tianxin was the sole son of two Storms of the Eight Directions; Chen Changsheng was the Pope.

Very few people in the continent had the right to speak of them in such a tone, and those of similar age to this girl were few and far between.

Such people included Luoluo, Nanke, and the little Black Dragon. Coincidentally, they were all people on Chen Changsheng's side.

This girl was not Chen Changsheng's friend, but she still dared to speak of him this way because she was not from this continent.

She was from the Great Western Continent, and just like Luoluo and those other girls, she was also a princess.

Mu Jiushi, the most enigmatic of the Orthodoxy's Six Prefects, had all of her glory and strength snatched away from her by the previous Pope, but that glory and strength had belonged to the Orthodoxy.

As long as she still had her blood, she possessed a glory and strength that no one could underestimate, a status that was still worthy of veneration, as she was Madam Mu's younger sister. From a certain perspective, she represented the will of the Great Western Continent.

As Bie Tianxin looked at her face and heard her voice, his body relaxed, not out of fear, but love.

When they met by accident three years ago in the capital, he fell in love with her, loved her to death.

In every aspect, she was worthy of his love, had the right to be loved by him, was his most ideal partner.

So even if she spoke to him with scorn and disdain, he still was not angry, only wanting to explain why he had no alternative.

"Who would be afraid of that guy? It's just... he's the Pope right now. Little Shi, you're from the Great Western Continent, so naturally don't need to care, but it's still different for me."

Mu Jiushi clearly did not care for his explanation. Placing down the wine pot, she walked into the courtyard.

She looked up at the gloomy sky. After a few moments of silence, she suddenly asked, "Why did he come to Hanqiu City?"

Bie Tianxin pondered the question and then replied with a solemn expression, "Could it be that he wants to go to Wenshui?"

This was a matter that anyone could understand; was there any need to think about it?

Mu Jiushi did not turn around, so Bie Tianxin could not see the ridicule on her lips, only hear her praise.

"Brother Bie's words are reasonable... We should immediately inform the capital and Wenshui."

Bie Tianxin smiled. "Relax, I'll go and do it in a little while."

Mu Jiushi softly cautioned, "Do not mention me."

Bie Tianxin's smile faded as he sighed, "Little Shi, I know that your Great Western Continent is not as calm as it seems. Even Madam Mu was forced to leave her home, let alone you, so you don't dare let our relationship be known to anyone else, but... you really don't need to be afraid. As long as my parents know of it, would that elder brother of yours dare to do anything to you?"

Mu Jiushi turned around and asked, "But your parents... what will they think?"

Bie Tianxin said affectionately to her, "As long as I love you, my parents will definitely love you as well."

Mu Jiushi was apparently deeply moved. Walking up to him, she looked into his eyes and gently asked, "How much do you love me?"

Nothing could satisfy Bie Tianxin more than to have his lover in front of him. With heartfelt love and sincerity, he declared, "I would be willing to die for you."

Mu Jiushi lightly leaned on his shoulder and looked at the ancient scholar tree in the courtyard. She whispered, "Excellent."

She placed her hand on his chest, apparently because she was stopping him out of shyness. In reality, she just needed to slightly circulate her true essence to shatter Bie Tianxin's Ethereal Palace.

If this happened, he really would die.

Chapter 811 – How Deep Is the Affection of the People in the Courtyard?

Within the quiet and secluded courtyard, man and woman embraced, the depths of their affection for each other unknown.

Across from them was an ancient scholar tree that still had a few leaves, even in the winter. Underneath the tree stood a blue-clothed person.

This person wore a copper mask on their face that made them look like a ghost.

Mu Jiushi rested her head on Bie Tianxin's shoulder and calmly looked at this blue-clothed person.

This was a very bizarre scene.

Bie Tianxin was completely unaware.

The blue-clothed figure shook his head, and the shadows cast by the leaves of the scholar tree on his mask slightly moved.

Mu Jiushi slightly creased her brow and then closed her eyes, no longer looking at that person.

Bie Tianxin noticed this and he suddenly felt a little hot. He wanted to stretch out his hand, but he didn't dare.

After some time, the cold wind blew against the scholar tree, causing it to rustle. With a reluctant heart, Bie Tianxin left the courtyard.

Mu Jiushi walked under the ancient scholar tree and stared into the eyes peeking out from behind the blue-clothed person's mask. She asked, "Why didn't you let me kill him?"

The blue-clothed person's voice was rather gravelly. "You should understand very well that killing him is just a method, not our goal."

Mu Jiushi's voice turned sharp, brimming with anger. "It was no easy feat to make Chen Changsheng meet with that trash. How can we miss this chance!"

The blue-clothed person replied, "Even if you kill Bie Tianxin, we can't place the crime on Chen Changsheng."

Mu Jiushi sneered, "Is the breath of the Black Frost Dragon not enough proof? After all, in the entire continent, only he has one at his side."

The blue-clothed person replied, "The problem is that Zhusha is not at Chen Changsheng's side today."

Mu Jiushi was startled, then asked, "Then who is that girl with him right now?"

The person replied, "I don't know. Someone is currently investigating the matter."

Mu Jiushi thought of that scene from just a few moments ago, her beautiful face revealing an expression of absolute loathing. "Then how long will I have to endure?"

After a pause, the blue-clothed person answered, "Nobody knows when the best moment will come. We must continue to wait."

Mu Jiushi sneered, "So then we just have to watch Chen Changsheng enter Wenshui City?"

The blue-clothed figure affectionately rubbed her head and said, "Even if he enters Wenshui City, he can't affect the situation within the city or the general situation beyond it in the slightest. The vast majority of people living in that city have the surname of Tang. Not even Tianhai or Yin were able to deal with it, so what can he do? Of course, to avoid any surprises, quite a few people, including me, will attempt to keep him outside."

.....

.....

In the flourishing and warm south, a bushy and messy beard might incite a few fearful and repelling gazes, but in the north, on the border that had been irrigated by blood and fire for so many years, it would actually offer many advantages. For instance, one could curse and snatch someone else's bowl of alcohol from the tavernkeeper's hand, but nobody would dare say anything about it.

It was just that it was rather inconvenient when drinking.

Whether one was just taking a sip or heroically gulping it down, it was very easy for alcohol to wet the beard.

At the time, this might feel like a very unrestrained and meaningless matter, but after waking up from one's drunken stupor, one would always feel rather unhappy at the stickiness, requiring the beard to be washed quite a few times.

After growing his beard for three years, Luo Bu watched the alcohol drip from his beard onto the floor and for the first time began to consider the question of whether he should shave.

And then he started, thinking to himself, when did I begin caring about such trivial concerns?

Eating meat and drinking wine together with a mouthful of beard was something he had already experienced countless times. Why was it that he didn't care while with the roaming cavalry of Seven Li Xi or at Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, but cared about it now?

Perhaps it was because he had gotten to know a guy in the past few days that loved cleanliness? When that guy woke up from his coma, he couldn't move his fingers, so he urgently used his eyes to ask for someone to help him wash his face. While recovering from his injuries, he also didn't forget to change into a clean set of clothes every day, just like a young girl.

Luo Bu fell silent with a sudden thought: could this be the sort of person that Junior Sister likes?

At this moment, he sensed something and raised his head to look

outside the tavern, just in time to see Bie Tianxin walk out of that alley.

This morning, outside that perfume store, he saw Bie Tianxin and followed him, discovering the secluded courtyard within the alley. However, he did not enter, as he vaguely sensed that there was someone in the courtyard, someone very strong.

Luo Bu took out a charcoal pencil and began to draw on the prepared sheet of white paper.

He drew Bie Tianxin and his surrounding environment, like the alley and that barely visible ancient scholar tree.

It was plain to see that he was very skilled in this pursuit. With a few casual smears from the charcoal pencil, the silhouettes of the alley and the scholar tree quickly materialized. As for Bie Tianxin's portrait, it seemed to move with the pencil, growing clearer and clearer until it almost seemed about to come to life, his two eyebrows seemingly about to fly up as if they were real.

If that painter at Wang Zhice's side saw this sight, he would definitely think of a way to seize Luo Bu, drag him back to Sangharama Temple, and make him his disciple.

Yes, his drawing was so good that it felt like he was in another realm.

After finishing his drawing, he did not leave, but continued to sit in the tavern and wait. Finally, after quite some time, he saw the person he wanted to see.

Mu Jiushi and a masked stranger dressed in blue departed on a carriage. By coincidence, a breeze blew by at this moment, lifting up the curtain.

It was just a momentary glimpse, not even enough for the eyes to see anything clearly, but Luo Bu's brush could.

In a short time, a drawing was completed.

This drawing was rich with detail and had a certain charm about it. Anyone who knew Mu Jiushi or the blue-clothed stranger would never fail to recognize them in this drawing.

Examining the pair on the drawing, Luo Bu arched his brows and commented, "The Great Western Continent truly does have ambitions, but just who will they fall on?"

.....

.....

Chen Changsheng did not believe that his meeting with Bie Tianxin in Hanqiu City was an accident, because the probability was too small.

This meeting was highly likely to have been arranged, which also meant that his movements were no longer a secret.

In truth, his encounter with that monster in the Willow Lodge was already proof of this point.

There were still more than a thousand li between Hanqiu City and Wenshui. He would still encounter many other things on this journey.

If he were following his own ideas, he would naturally be unwilling to fall into this sort of situation. After leaving Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, he would not have informed anyone in the Orthodoxy, but prioritized rushing over to Wenshui City before saying anything. However, that letter had stated very clearly that if he wanted to safely return to the capital, he first had to find that person.

That person who had revealed his tracks—just who were they?

Back when he was learning the sword from Su Li in the wilderness, he had also learned the art of war. But because of his personality, he was still unable to understand the complexity of the world and the human mind. Fortunately, the writer of the letter understood these matters very well, so he now essentially

knew the answer to this question.

It was very simple, as only three people knew of his route.

Chen Changsheng gazed in silence at the white stones lining the path for a very long time.

Chapter 812 – The Solitary Star Returns

The stones had clearly been turned pure white only after being washed by water for many years.

Not far from the stones was a river. It was currently late winter, a period of low water, but if it were summer, the river would probably reach up to here.

There were two paths to Wenshui. One path went along this river, while the other path circled around from the north and was a bit more difficult to traverse.

Chen Changsheng chose the northern path. This was different from his planned route, but it had also been a part of his plans.

To the northwest of Hanqiu City was a massive and lifeless mountain of rock. After passing through this mountain and working one's way around a vast swamp, one would arrive at the Cong Province Army headquarters.

The Cong Province Army headquarters was the most remote of the ten-some army headquarters the Great Zhou had in the north, and was extremely close to demi-human territory.

Walking through this barren rock of a mountain where only a few blades of grass grew, Chen Changsheng very naturally recalled that Xue Xingchuan had made his name at the Cong Province Army headquarters. He then remembered Madam Xue, and also that young master of the Xue clan who had entered the Orthodox Academy last year. Finally, he remembered that it had already been many years since he had last seen Luoluo.

The sun hung in the western sky, quite a few of its rays piercing through the sand in the air. It seemed to be in a bad mood.

Right when they crossed this rocky mountain, Nanke's eyes narrowed, and her small face suddenly appeared extremely vigilant.

Although she was an imbecile that had forgotten her past, she still had her strength. She was incredibly sensitive to hidden dangers.

Chen Changsheng glanced at her.

Nanke raised her face and sniffed at the air like a small dog.

"What do you smell?" Chen Changsheng asked.

"Blood, a very thick scent of blood."

Nanke's voice was absolutely flat, her mood indifferent, like she was commenting about the smell of food.

Chen Changsheng asked, "Did you smell the scent of that monster?"

After leaving Hanqiu City, that monster never appeared again, but Chen Changsheng remained vigilant. If that monster really was from the Yellow Springs, if he really had judged correctly, then it would be a very vexing problem.

Nanke shook her head. She lowered her head to think for a while, then continued walking along the mountain ridge.

Ever since they had set out from Hanqiu City, the gravelly ground and the color of the sky were of the same hue: a dusty gray.

But when they crossed the mountain, the colors of the world instantly changed.

This side of the mountain was red—not the natural tone of the earth, but dyed by blood.

Everywhere was blood and corpses.

Some corpses were like small mountains. From their coarse fur and specially shaped armor, they were probably soldiers from the Brown Bear tribe.

There were also many corpses belonging to human soldiers.

The stones on the ground had all been painted red by blood, the

thick and sticky substance exuding a foul stench into the air.

It was like a small-scale war had taken place here.

Amongst the corpses, only one person was still alive. He slowly stood up and turned to Chen Changsheng.

In such bitterly cold weather, he only wore one layer of clothing, and he had even rolled up the sleeves, baring his forearms to the elements. His pants were also shorter than normal pants, making for a rather comical look. But upon realizing that he had done this to make it easier to attack and run, one might feel a chill in one's heart.

He was still like before.

Chen Changsheng felt like he was back at the Grand Examination, standing in front of the Li Palace and looking at that youth in the morning light.

With a flicker of the morning light, five years passed.

Chen Changsheng walked over to him.

Zhexiu walked over to meet Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng opened his arms wide, preparing to give a warm embrace in the style of Tang Thirty-Six.

But Zhexiu gripped his sword, a hint of red appearing in his eyes. Surprisingly, he was prepared to undergo berserk metamorphosis.

Chen Changsheng followed his gaze and realized that he was staring at Nanke. He understood and said, "It's okay."

Zhexiu did not relax his guard. Staring at Nanke, he asked, "What's going on here?"

In the Garden of Zhou, he had not personally met with Nanke, but given his personality, he had naturally investigated her thoroughly in preparation for when they met in the future. To his surprise, the next time he saw this Demon Princess, she was at Chen Changsheng's side, and she was clearly acting like a follower.

Chen Changsheng put down his hands, using his eyes to indicate that it was not convenient to speak about the matter in detail as he said, "I'll explain it to you later."

He then looked around at the corpse-covered ground and asked, "And what's going on here?"

"Someone was worried that you would come from the north, and sent people to kill you."

Zhexiu's tone as he spoke was still as flat, or indifferent, as it was in the past, as if there was nothing that could make him too agitated.

Like this gory sight and the plot hidden behind it—assassinating the Pope was not a trivial concern.

Nanke suddenly spoke, wary and disbelieving, "You killed all these people?"

She did not recognize Zhexiu, but she could sense how dangerous he was. Her wariness was to be expected, and as for her disbelief, this was also very reasonable.

Since they were sent to kill Chen Changsheng, these soldiers of the Brown Bear tribe and human soldiers must have been extremely powerful, with many experts among them.

No matter how skilled Zhexiu was in battle, he could not kill so many people. Moreover, not a single one of them had been able to escape.

Chen Changsheng also felt this to be very strange. Even if Zhexiu managed to advance by leaps and bounds in his cultivation over these past three years, he could not have reached this level.

"I had companions," Zhexiu answered.

As if to prove his words, many mournful wolf howls suddenly rose from the distant mountain ridge.

"A few young fellows from the tribe snuck out and are currently

following me. Besides that, I have a few acquaintances in Cong Province."

Zhexiu said to Chen Changsheng, "The Brown Bear tribe has always been crafty. We lay in wait here for three days, and then..."

Chen Changsheng suddenly felt very cheerful and didn't pay attention to the rest of Zhexiu's account.

The Wolf tribe's attitude towards Zhexiu seemed to be changing, and he surprisingly also had acquaintances.

In the past, this would be quite unimaginable.

Zhexiu, who had fixed the Solitary Star Heaven's Curse as his Fated Star, actually had companions?

It appeared that that period in the Orthodox Academy had effected a few unforgettable changes to every person living within.

.....

.....

On the same night, the three made camp in the desert on the other side of the mountain valley, upwind where they could not smell the blood. With a few moment's effort, Zhexiu had dug out a slanted cave around three zhang deep in the cold, hard earth. The bottom of the cave was very dry and still somewhat warm, and there was no need to worry about being disturbed by beasts.

Zhexiu had been living like this since he was very young.

Nanke laid down the bedding at the bottom of the cave and lay down. Chen Changsheng took out his needles and began to treat her.

By the time the treatment finished, Nanke had already fallen asleep. He pulled the blankets up to her neck and then turned around and headed out of the cave.

Zhexiu was crouched on the ground outside the cave, looking at something.

He was still used to crouching, not sitting. Like a lonely wolf, he was prepared to attack or escape at any moment.

Chapter 813 – Everyone that You Treat and Save... Isn't Human

The desert in the night was very cold. Without any wind, the dust stirred up in the daytime slowly settled to the ground, leaving the air very clean.

The stars in the night sky were so densely packed that they seemed unreal.

Xining Village was only several hundred li from the Cloud Grave, so it was often foggy. As a result, Chen Changsheng had only seen this sort of starry night in the wilderness on his journey back to the south with Su Li.

The bright starlight shone on the desert. The invisible star radiance was also somewhat more concentrated, falling on the needle between his fingers and providing the best cleansing method.

"Turn around," Chen Changsheng said to Zhexiu.

Zhexiu turned around, not asking why.

These sorts of words had been spoken many times in the Orthodox Academy and the Mausoleum of Books, so he was very familiar with the procedure.

A needle was slowly thrust into Zhexiu's neck and then began to tremble in Chen Changsheng's fingers.

Zhexiu's brows slightly rose.

Chen Changsheng knew that this represented pain, because Zhexiu was not one who like to twist his brow in pain, as this would indicate that he was not tough enough.

If even Zhexiu felt it painful, just how painful was it?

Chen Changsheng poured true essence into Zhexiu's meridians

and began to examine the state of his body.

Zhexiu closed his eyes.

In a short while, an almost indescribable flow of true essence, somewhat like a tide, charged through Zhexiu's meridians.

In response, his blood similarly surged.

The fingers Chen Changsheng was using to hold the needle were almost jolted off.

Zhexiu's eyelids trembled.

This was Zhexiu's illness: the Tide Rush of Blood.

In both the medical books and Daoist scriptures, this sort of inborn illness resulting from a conflict in bloodlines was described as a fatal illness that no medicine could treat.

This was the reason Su Li and the Mount Li Sword Sect had taken such a tough stance towards the relationship between Zhexiu and Qi Jian.

Chen Changsheng did not release his fingers, instead continuing to silently wait. He also placed two more needles at two of Zhexiu's other meridians.

After some time, he finally pulled out the needles and stared into Zhexiu's eye. "You haven't been taking the medicine on schedule?"

After killing Zhou Tong, he and Zhexiu had left the capital. Although they had both come to the north, they had never once met.

But he had already prepared a prescription beforehand, clearly indicating how to take the medicine and what should be paid attention.

Tonight, it seemed that although Zhexiu's illness had not worsened any, it had also not improved. Some sort of problem must have occurred.

As he looked at Chen Changsheng's bright and serious eyes, Zhexiu felt an inexplicable sense of apology, but his face remained expressionless.

"I'm fighting constantly. Whether it's scouting out the enemy or chasing and assassinating, they all require long expeditions. At times, I even have to hide in the snow for seven days and nights."

He continued, "Where could I find the time to take medicine? And that medicine brings me trouble. It requires boiling, but I can't light a fire."

Chen Changsheng didn't know how to reply. After a pause, he said, "Then I'll think of another way and see if it can be made into a powder or pill."

Hearing this, Zhexiu thought of that rumor and asked, "You fed me the Cinnabar Pill?"

Chen Changsheng nodded.

A bit more than a year ago, Chen Changsheng had thought of a few methods to resolve the conflict between two divine laws of the world, allowing him to make his blood into the Cinnabar Pill. At the first opportunity, he had Zhizhi deliver the pill to Zhexiu, but... he discovered that his blood was of no use against Zhexiu's illness.

The current rumor circulating about the world that the Cinnabar Pill could bring the dying back to life was truthfully rather exaggerated.

The Cinnabar Pill truly was effective for those casualties from the battlefield who had suffered damage to their limbs or lost too much blood, but it absolutely could not cure all illnesses.

Like Zhexiu's illness, or Nanke's illness.

Whether it was the Tide Rush of Blood or a chaotic soul, they were all extremely rare and strange illnesses.

Zhexiu asked, "Can my illness be cured?"

Chen Changsheng was a superb doctor and had an unmatched understanding of the meridians.

If not even he could cure Zhexiu's illness, then it really was incurable.

Chen Changsheng did not attempt to deceive him, whispering, "The outlook isn't very good."

Zhexiu appeared very calm, or perhaps numb. After hearing this answer, he only fell quiet for a few moments, then asked, "What about her?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head and replied, "I still haven't found a method. I'm just using medicine and needles to help stabilize her soul."

"It looks to me like she's not a true imbecile."

"There are thousands of ways for one to be an imbecile."

"Then how will she wake up?"

"I only hope that she can have some lucky encounter and wake up herself."

Zhexiu looked into his eyes and asked, "Have you ever thought about what you will do if she really does wake up?"

Chen Changsheng found it impossible to imagine such a sight. He pondered the question for a few moments, then said, "I'll think about it when the time comes."

Zhexiu continued, "Even if she's never able to wake up, if someone recognizes her, it will still cause a big problem."

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning.

Nanke was not an ordinary person.

She wasn't even a human.

She was a demon, and a Demon Princess at that.

One recalled that even with Su Li's power and means, he still had to conceal his love for a Demon Princess from the world and hide his daughter's name while raising her in Mount Li.

And he was not Su Li.

Of course, his situation was different from Su Li's. He did not have that sort of relationship with Nanke.

But if he always kept Nanke at his side, he would have to face this problem eventually.

Zhexiu's question made him recall that Demon Princess who had died in the Longevity Sect's cold pool, which made him recall the conversation between two generations of Demon Lords on that night in the mountains.

The young Demon Lord had been very shocked to see the Heavenly Demon Horn, as everyone in Xuelao City believed that that Demon Princess had taken this divine object with her when she left for the human world twenty-some years ago. Who could have expected that after all this time, the Heavenly Demon Horn would reappear in his father's hands?

Compared to all those other events that took place that night, this was just a trivial matter, but now that he thought about it, a great deal of information was concealed behind it.

If the Heavenly Demon Horn really had been taken from Xuelao City by that Demon Princess, then after her death, it was highly likely that the Heavenly Demon Horn should have been lost in the Longevity Sect.

How had it reappeared in the Demon Lord's hand?

He then recalled that little monster he had encountered in Hanqiu City that seemed to have flowed out of the Yellow Springs.

An ancient legacy that not even the Li Palace possessed? Just which place in the world could preserve it? It naturally had to be the equally ancient Longevity Sect.

Chen Changsheng silently thought, his expression turning grave.

It was naturally important to find that person in the Orthodoxy that was working with the Imperial Court, but it was even more important that he find the person that was colluding with the demons.

This question had been on his mind ever since that night in the mountains.

With someone's help, the young Demon Lord had managed to easily deceive countless people and changes places with the original young array master on the stretcher.

Now that he looked at it, could it be that it was not a person that was working with the demons, but a sect? Or perhaps a noble clan?

Chapter 814 – A New Comrade

Chen Changsheng suddenly asked, "Is there a chance that the Longevity Sect would collude with the demons?"

Zhexiu replied, "It is the ancestral hall of the Daoist sects in the south, a famous righteous sect. The idea is completely unreasonable."

His answer was not based in virtue or morality, but in terms of benefit to be gained.

Betrayal demanded benefits, and the Longevity Sect's roots lay in the Human race and the Daoist faith. What benefits could working with the demons offer it?

Chen Changsheng asked, "But have you ever thought, if the Longevity Sect had not been working with Xuelao City, just how could the Longevity Sect have been able to capture Qi Jian's mother?"

This truly was a problem.

Back then, the whereabouts of the Demon Princess were assuredly extremely secret. Logically speaking, the Longevity Sect should not have been able to capture her so easily.

"Just now, when you finished recounting what happened in the mountains, I also began to think about this problem."

Zhexiu continued, "Su Li massacred the Longevity Sect too ruthlessly. Even if it still had some reserves in the south, it's impossible for it to deceive everyone at the Mount Song Army headquarters."

Chen Changsheng looked into his eyes and asked, "And if they have other helpers?"

Zhexiu understood his meaning, a cold light flashing briefly in his eyes.

This journey of theirs to Wenshui was to pick up a friend. It now seemed they also had to ask a few more questions while they were there.

Night enveloped the desert. Low roars could faintly be heard from the distance, perhaps beasts gnawing on those corpses.

The earlier conversation had mentioned Qi Jian's parents multiple times, so the conversation continued along that line.

Chen Changsheng asked, "How many years has it been since the two of you met?"

Zhexiu thought, then replied, "Five years?"

Time passed at a steady speed, not fast or slow, making it very easy for a person to go numb, to forget many things.

Chen Changsheng asked, "Do you still remember her?"

Zhexiu thought of that charge through the Garden of Zhou, how they struggled to survive together in the Plains of the Unsetting Sun, of how he carried her and she gave directions. The lines on his face gradually began to soften.

He did not need to answer Chen Changsheng's question, because an answer was not required. Similarly, he did not need to remember, because he had never forgotten.

"Don't worry, after I cure your illness, we'll go with you to Mount Li to propose. Of course, that's if she hasn't forgotten you."

"How can a famous sect of the south think much of a lonely soul like me? And in the eyes of the common people, I've always been a monster."

"You're not a lonely soul, you're the Vice Superintendent of the Orthodox Academy. And besides... Mount Li is different."

"And you? How is Xu Yourong doing? It's been a long time since anyone's heard any news about her."

Chen Changsheng fell quiet at Zhexiu's question, his face clearly

showing yearning and concern.

It had already been half a year since he had received a letter from Wenshui City, but it was now almost two years since he had received one from Holy Maiden Peak and three years since they had last met.

"She's in seclusion."

Chen Changsheng paused, then continued, "Absolute seclusion."

Only at the most crucial moments would cultivators enter absolutely closed cultivation, as this was an extremely dangerous method of cultivation. No one knew when they might break through: a few months, a few years, a few decades, or perhaps until they passed away while seated in their cave.

Xu Yourong possessed shocking talent, so her absolute seclusion was assuredly different from normal, presumably more dangerous.

But Zhexiu could understand why Xu Yourong had chosen to enter absolute seclusion.

Holy Maiden Peak required a true Holy Maiden; the Li Palace required a true ally.

So she needed to break past that threshold in the shortest time and enter the Divine Domain.

Zhexiu didn't know what to say, so he could only pat Chen Changsheng on the shoulder in comfort.

After not meeting for three years, they spoke much more than they did in the past, but they were still not very skilled with their words, unlike that fellow in Wenshui City.

Just then, a figure suddenly appeared on the distant mountain ridge, accompanied by a tough and cold voice.

"Whoever you are, don't think about escaping."

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu had a momentary misperception, feeling that that fellow really had appeared.

The figure walked down the mountain ridge and finally reached them.

It was not the person they were thinking of, though this one was truthfully rather similar to that one in certain aspects. As a result, whenever they met, they would immediately be at odds with each other, wanting nothing more than to fight.

This person was a swordsman. Though he was covered in dust, it could not obscure his heroic aura.

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu had spoken for a while on Mount Li, and now someone from Mount Li had truly come.

Guan Feibai, Fourth Law of the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws, a genius of the sword from Mount Li, only beneath Qiushan Jun in terms of talent.

Upon seeing Chen Changsheng after three years in this desolate and rocky mountain, Guan Feibai was naturally shocked, his mouth agape as he struggled to find something to say.

And then he remembered that Chen Changsheng was no longer an ordinary student of the Orthodox Academy, but the Pope.

They were acquaintances, but this generation of Mount Li Sword Sect disciples were different from their martial granduncle and were always very courteous.

He bowed to Chen Changsheng and said, "Paying respects to His Holiness the Pope."

Chen Changsheng had long since risen and now sincerely returned the bow.

Guan Feibai had many questions he wanted to ask, but hesitated to speak.

Chen Changsheng asked, "How did you come here?"

Guan Feibai replied, "I received an order to leave Blue Pass and scout the enemy. By accident, I discovered that the Brown Bear

tribe was acting strangely, so I followed their tracks to here."

Zhexiu glanced at him, looking rather surprised. "You're a scout?"

Guan Feibai arched his brows and asked back, "Are you the only one allowed to do it?"

It seemed that not much had changed from the Grand Examination and the Mausoleum of Books.

Back then, the only one of the Mount Li Sword Sect's inner sect disciples that Chen Changsheng had somewhat of a conflict with was Guan Feibai.

The reason was very simple: his personality was too stubborn, his temper bad, he was excessively violent, and his mouth never spared anybody. In a few aspects, he was rather similar to Tang Thirty-Six.

Other than friends of the same faction, no one would ever like this sort of person, just like how the person of the Orthodox Academy that the common people most loathed was always surnamed 'Tang'.

Later, Chen Changsheng's impressions of Guan Feibai underwent a significant change. It was not because of their interactions in the Mausoleum of Books and at Boiling Stone Summit, but after that, when the Imperial Court was using its full might to suppress the Orthodox Academy. When no one dared to offer their support... Guan Feibai had come.

He and Chen Changsheng had conducted a very uninteresting conversation, after which he had requested that Chen Changsheng personally send him off.

This was a stance, a stance that he did not mind having the entire capital see.

Chen Changsheng was grateful and told him, "Thank you."

Guan Feibai had replied, "You're welcome."

To these youths that had experienced Xun Mei intruding upon the Divine Path and Wang Po sending him off, these two words held a very deep meaning.

'From this point on, we are friends.'

"Did you kill all of them?"

Guan Feibai pointed at the mountain behind them.

Chen Changsheng turned to Zhexiu.

Zhexiu did not speak, as he did not like to talk.

With no other alternative, Chen Changsheng explained.

"In the past few years, the Brown Bear tribe has been working together with the Demon race in secret. Only when they saw how our side was improving last year did they begin to get close to us again. Their background has never been clean and they're easily controlled by others." Guan Feibai looked at him and asked, "The problem is, just who wants to kill you?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "We want to go to Wenshui."

With this simple answer, Guan Feibai understood. After a few moments of thought, he asked, "Is that guy okay?"

Chapter 815 – The Mysterious Expert from the West

"I don't know." Chen Changsheng shook his head and added, "It's already been half a year since he sent me a message."

Guan Feibai silently thought for a few moments, then suddenly said, "I'll go with you."

Chen Changsheng was rather shocked and Zhexiu also raised his head. From the Ivy Festival to the Grand Examination, and then while viewing the monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books and taking part in the Boiling Stone Summit, when Tang Thirty-Six and Guan Feibai saw each other, they would begin quarreling so intensely that they almost came to blows. Why did he want to go to Wenshui?

Seeing the look in their eyes, Guan Feibai felt a little uncomfortable. "Is it not okay for me to go and make fun of him for being useless?"

"That's fine, it's up to you," Chen Changsheng said with a smile.

Zhexiu shook his head, thinking, after all these years, why are all of you still acting like children?

Chen Changsheng asked, "What of Blue Pass? Although it's said that your Mount Li Sword Sect still only takes suggestions and not orders, it's not good to just up and leave."

Guan Feibai replied, "I told them beforehand that after I finished this mission, I would return to Mount Li. I'll just have the relay station in the next town deliver a letter, and it will be finished."

Chen Changsheng was somewhat surprised, asking, "You were intending to return to Mount Li?"

"Second Brother should have already left Snowhold Pass by this time. All of my martial brothers are going back."

"Because the demons retreated?"

"There is that reason, but it's primarily because Eldest Brother is returning to Mount Li."

Hearing this, Chen Changsheng fell silent. After a while, he asked, "Just where has your senior brother been these past few years?"

Chen Changsheng had not appeared in public for three years now, but Qiushan Jun had been missing for five.

Just where had Qiushan Jun gone? This was a question that everyone was very interested in.

"We also don't know."

Guan Feibai looked at Chen Changsheng, wanting to say something, but he ultimately chose not to.

Anyone could tell that Qiushan Jun's disappearance was assuredly related to Chen Changsheng. To be more precise, it was related to his engagement with Xu Yourong. Chen Changsheng was quiet for a very long time, finally saying, "I've never met Qiushan Jun, but if he really is as all of you describe, I'm confident that he would never seclude himself out of lovesickness."

.....

.....

The starlight was brightest at the extremely late hours of the night.

Standing at the peak, one could see all sorts of sights.

Outside Hanqiu City, with the mountain ridge as the boundary, the world was divided in two. On one side was a fertile land irrigated by a river for countless years. Even in the deep winter, it was still somewhat green and did not give off the slightest hint of desolation. On the other side, however, was a mountain valley and desert, formed from stones and utterly devoid of life, appearing

desolate to the extreme.

If one wanted to go to Wenshui, traveling along either side was fine.

Luo Bu did not know how Chen Changsheng would choose. What he wanted to know right now was how those assassins in the forest would choose.

There were many experts amongst these assassins. One part came from the Tang clan, one part from the Wu clan, another from the Mutuo clan, and one from his own clan.

Simply put, these people were the elite strength of the Four Great Clans.

If these pursuers really did catch up to Chen Changsheng, no one could be sure what the final result would be.

Under the starlight, the forests were brimming with an unreal and illusory beauty, and what happened next made Luo Bu wonder if all this was real.

The assassins from the Four Great Clans did not choose any path. After receiving reports from their scouts and engaging in a discussion, they retreated along their original path.

Luo Bu had a deep understanding of the cautious and conservative attitude of these noble clans. After a moment's thought, he had a rough guess of what had occurred.

These assassins had found it impossible to confirm the route Chen Changsheng had chosen, so if they wanted to pursue him, they would have to split up. This sounded like a very simple math problem, dividing one into halves, but the backstabbing between the noble clans made the problem more complicated. In addition, they were not confident that they could kill Chen Changsheng with only half their number.

An even more important problem was that the hand signals used by the scouts to report very clearly communicated that the

situation of the road going south along the river had changed.

So they were forced to consider, was this a trap laid by the Orthodoxy?

.....

.....

Luo Bu glanced north at the stone mountain and desert, a dazzling white under the starlight, then turned around and headed down the mountain.

Under the cover of the dark forest, he very quickly reached the river.

In the darkness, he silently walked along the river, all the way until the morning sun rose and painted the meandering river into a belt of silver.

This river was a tributary of the Wenshui that flowed south. Compared to the mountain and desert to the north, it was a little warmer. (TN: Wenshui translates to 'Wen River'. It can refer both to the river and to the city of Wenshui.)

But it was still midwinter, so the river was still frozen solid, its surface layered with a thick mantle of snow.

Ahead, the river turned right, where a thicket of winter plums grew on the protruding cliffs.

Luo Bu walked to that thicket. With a glance, he could see the people on the surface of the river in the distance.

Many holes had been torn in the ice covering the river, spreading cracks in all directions that extended for several dozen zhang. At the end of each crack lay a black-clothed figure.

The ice was stained with blood, the black-clothed figures unmoving. He could not tell whether they were still alive or not.

From this sight, he could imagine just how earthshaking the exchange that produced it was.

He could imagine just how powerful their opponent was.

There were still two figures standing atop the cold and snow-covered river.

One was that blue-clothed stranger that Luo Bu had seen in Hanqiu City. The stranger's face was still covered in a copper mask that made them seem abnormally terrifying.

Even more terrifying was the Qi exuded by their body.

When the snowflakes falling from the sky or the cold blowing across the river approached the stranger, they would naturally avoid it.

At this level of battle, the blue-clothed stranger could not conceal their own Qi, let alone their cultivation level.

Luo Bu slightly raised his brows, his right hand subconsciously gripping the sword at his waist.

Even if he attacked, he was still no match for the blue-clothed figure, but only by holding the sword could he remain calm, could he ensure that he had not been discovered.

The blue-clothed figure was an expert of the Divine Domain!

The hidden strength of the Great Western Continent truly had surpassed the reckonings of many people in the Central Continent.

Even more shocking was that despite the power of this blue-clothed figure, they had still been the loser in this morning's battle.

A trickle of blood flowed down the stranger's shoulder and a small piece was missing from the copper mask.

Who could defeat a Divine Domain expert?

Standing on the other side of the river, that person also wore a blue gown, but a fainter blue, and also a much simpler gown.

He was not wearing a mask. His face directly confronted the

snow and this world with an indifferent expression.

His eyebrows were drooped and his shoulders were somewhat sunken, so he looked very impoverished.

The wind and snow blew about his body. One of his sleeves ruffled, unexpectedly empty.

Three years ago, he had cut off his own arm.

His remaining hand gripped a metal blade.

Fearless he stood as the wind blew about him.

The flow of water beneath him had already been severed.

"I did not expect that I would have the chance to experience Wang Po of Tianliang's blade."

The blue-clothed stranger's raspy voice said.

With a serene expression, Wang Po replied, "I also didn't expect that I would get a chance to glimpse the elegant manner of an expert of the Great Western Continent."

Chapter 816 – The Great Western Continent's Ambitions

The blue-clothed stranger was surprised that Wang Po had seen through their origins at a glance. After silently pondering this, they replied, "I did not expect that the experts of the continent were already at such a high level. When Guan Xingke visited us, he was far inferior to you, and Tie Shu is also inferior to you. Could it be that your side is more suitable for cultivation?"

The stranger spoke of Guan Xingke and Tie Shu, both experts with very deep connections to the Great Western Continent, Tie Shu even being born there.

"You were on good terms with Tie Shu?" Wang Po asked.

The blue-clothed stranger replied, "He truly was an old acquaintance."

Wang Po calmly looked at the stranger and asked, "You want to take revenge for him?"

The stranger began to laugh, their voice still hoarse and raspy.

"Revenge? I once chased Tie Shu into the sea, where he was ultimately saved by Guan Xingke. He would not think that I would take vengeance for him, right?"

In their battle in the capital three years ago, Tie Shu had died under the strike that Wang Po used to break through, but no one could deny Tie Shu's power. When Tie Shu still lived on the Great Western Continent and had still not broken through that threshold, he was still an extremely talented expert, yet he had been pushed into such desperate straits by this person. From this, one could presume that this person had an extremely high status and lofty reputation in the Great Western Continent.

Wang Po thought of this person's rueful comment and explained, "It's not that the Central Continent is more suitable for cultivation,

but that we have more cultivators here, so the competition is more intense."

The blue-clothed stranger muttered for a while before finally saying, "That is reasonable. Then in your view, with my current level of strength, where would I rank in the Central Continent?"

Wang Po replied, "Probably in the top ten."

The continent was vast and contained countless experts. That Wang Po, a great expert of the blade, would personally say that this stranger would rank in the top ten meant that this person was truly extraordinary.

Yet all he received in exchange from the stranger was a sigh.

"Only top ten?"

The blue-clothed stranger sorrowfully said, "In the end, remaining content in one's small corner in peace and joy is not the proper path of the cultivator. Falling behind is a given."

Wang Po replied, "Peace and joy is also desirable."

The stranger looked into Wang Po's eyes and said, "Falling behind will result in being attacked, sealing oneself off will end in decay. In the end, we should still return."

Wang Po fell silent for a very long time before saying, "I have no opinion on this matter."

If the humans living on the Great Western Continent wanted to return to the Central Continent, it would certainly be a major event that would provoke all sorts of troubles and disputes.

Even if only a small portion of experts wanted to return, they would still require territory and resources.

But from Emperor Taizong to the Tianhai Divine Empress and up to the present, this had been the irresistible trend, from the alliance with the demi-humans to the confluence of the north and south and finally to the unification of the east and west.

Because if humanity wanted to resist and ultimately exterminate the Demon race, it had to gather together its entire strength.

After all, those living on the Great Western Continent were still humans, so in the view of many human experts, they were even more trustworthy than the demi-humans of White Emperor City and it was only right that the relationship be strengthened. As for the demi-humans themselves, in the past they might have been worried that the return of the humans from the Great Western Continent might affect their status, but now that their empress was from the Great Western Continent, they would probably not be too wary.

The number of people that could decide this matter was very small: the Emperor of the Great Zhou, the Pope, the Holy Maiden, the White Emperor couple, and now one needed to add Shang Xingzhou.

An expert like Wang Po naturally had a voice in this matter as well.

In the past, Wang Po had supported it, but now, his thinking had changed.

Whether it was the fact that Mu Jiushi had almost become the next Pope or that a Divine Domain expert of the Great Western Continent had brought people in an attempt to kill Chen Changsheng, it was now plain to see that Shang Xingzhou had worked through Madam Mu to form a pact with the Great Western Continent.

The conflict between the Great Zhou Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy was worsening by the day, each side keeping watch over the other, making it extremely difficult for the Imperial Court to secretly mobilize true experts and kill the Pope. However, the Great Western Continent was a power that came from beyond the chessboard.

If Chen Changsheng had truly journeyed along the river as he

had originally planned, then if Wang Po had not come, the Great Western Continent really might have killed him.

Wang Po would not accept this.

"Since you have no opinion on the matter, why did you appear here?"

The blue-clothed stranger asked, "The Orthodoxy must have had preparations, so your presence was not needed, or perhaps His Holiness the Pope wished to use this method to force you into making a stand?"

"Just because I have no opinion does not mean that I do not have a standpoint. My standpoint has never once changed."

Wang Po continued, "When it was Tianhai against the Imperial clan, the Imperial Court against Su Li, or now where it's teacher against student, I have always supported the correct standpoint."

The stranger asked, "What do you mean by 'correct'?"

Wang Po answered, "His Holiness the Pope is a good person."

What was a correct standpoint? How could one determine right and wrong? It turned out to be just a simple question of good or bad.

But people would always change, so how could one make a judgment? Since one could not look at the entire life, one could only look at the moment. As long as they were a good person at this moment, then it was enough. When Su Li was heavily injured on the snowy plains several years ago or when Chen Changsheng was heavily wounded by Hai Di just a little bit more than a year ago, they should not have been treated this way by their own world.

After a moment of silence, the blue-clothed stranger asked, "And if it is the Tang clan that wants to kill him?"

Wang Po recalled that snowstorm in the capital from three years

ago.

While he and Tie Shu sat across from each other at the table, the Tang Second Master spoke four words.

'Kindness weighty as mountains'.

So what?

He still used his sheathed blade to slap the Second Master on the face. He still used his blade to break through the sheath and slay Tie Shu.

If kindness was as weighty as mountains, then it should be returned, but seeking repayment of kindness was another matter entirely.

The stranger understood his silence and shook his head. "It was the Tang Second Master that time, but if he enters Wenshui now, he will be confronting the Old Master."

Many years ago, Wang Po had worked as an accountant in Wenshui for quite a few years. The Tang Old Master had treated and raised him like his own son. It had been many years since he had returned to Wenshui; would he return this year? Just as the blue-clothed stranger said, the entire continent wanted to know, if he really did return to Wenshui, how would he face the Old Master? No matter how strong he was, how firm his will, could he possibly raise his blade against the Tang Old Master?

As he watched Wang Po's figure vanish downstream, Luo Bu fell into a long silence. His fingers moved lightly amongst the winter plums, not making a sound.

Even he would not know what to do in this situation.

The blue-clothed stranger also left.

Luo Bu left the river bank, following them at a distance of about two to three li.

This mysterious visitor from the Great Western Continent was

clearly an expert of the Divine Domain. Following them undiscovered was incredibly difficult, perhaps even a death sentence. But Luo Bu had no intention of stopping, because he wanted to know the entire truth of the matter.

It was just like how, several years ago, he had contended with the young experts of Xuelao City and taken enormous risks for the sake of that key.

And now he was confident that he would not be discovered by the stranger.

Both banks of the river were covered in dead grass carpeted with frost. They looked very similar to the grass around Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, like countless swords piled together.

He walked amidst this frosted grass as if wanting to become one with it, because he was also a sword.

Chapter 817 – The Myriad Golden Leaves of the Wenshui

There were many people who used a sword, but if one were to talk about attainments in the path of the sword, the normal person would believe that Chen Changsheng was the best.

This was because Chen Changsheng knew countless sword styles, possessed countless swords, and had also studied the sword under Su Li.

In truth, although Luo Bu did not know as many sword techniques as Chen Changsheng, he was certainly not inferior to Chen Changsheng in his understanding of the sword, and was even slightly superior.

After walking along the river for some time, he saw that the icy river came to a sudden break. Here was an extremely precipitous cliff with a ten-some-zhang difference in elevation.

The ice covered the plains and river, but where the river came to a sudden stop, the water below the layer of ice surged out, rumbling as it dropped down the cliff.

The blue-clothed stranger walked to a massive stone in the center of the river.

The waters of the river carried fragments of ice and bits of snow as they flowed past the boulder and poured down in a waterfall.

Mu Jiushi sat at the very front of the boulder, watching the rather turbid river water while in a thoughtful mood.

The stranger exchanged a few words with Mu Jiushi.

Luo Bu, concealed amongst the frosted grass, quietly watched.

The distance was too vast and the roaring of the water too loud for him to clearly hear what the two were saying, but he could still draw what he saw.

The charcoal pencil moved along the white paper, giving off a soft scratching sound, quickly rendering the snowy river, the chaotic waterfall, and the two people standing on the boulder.

The blue-clothed stranger suddenly turned around, shooting a glance at the forests lining the river.

The hand holding the charcoal pencil stiffened.

.....

.....

Leaving the desert, Chen Changsheng continued his journey towards Wenshui City. This time, however, it was not just Nanke at his side, but also Zhexiu and Guan Feibai.

He was well aware that he would encounter many troubles on this journey south, and after entering Wenshui City, he would encounter even more.

Neither he nor Zhexiu had said why they wanted to go to Wenshui.

It was just like how several years ago, after Chen Changsheng had defeated Zhou Ziheng outside the Orthodox Academy, he had boarded a carriage and gone off to the alley of the Northern Military Department.

At the time, he and that fellow had also not said what they were going to do.

Back then, they were going to Zhou Prison to pick someone up. It was the same now: they were going to Wenshui City to pick someone up.

That fellow was in Wenshui City and it had been a long time since they had heard anything from him.

Regardless of whether or not the people they encountered on the road really did dare to assassinate Chen Changsheng, many people did not want him to go to Wenshui.

So he had to go to Wenshui.

.....

.....

It was a clear and ordinary day in the winter of the third year of the new era. The winter clouds had suddenly dispersed, allowing the world to bask in a rare and beautiful sunlight. Chen Changsheng's party arrived on the plains outside Wenshui City.

When he could see Wenshui City in the distance, Wenshui City had already seen him.

One could firmly state that at this point, the entirety of Wenshui City knew that he had arrived.

But nothing happened.

Whether it was the Tang clan guards at the city gate or the peddlers and pedestrians along the road, none of them revealed any sort of strange expression upon seeing them.

To put it more accurately, those guards and peddlers didn't even give them a glance, even when they were having their entry papers examined.

Wenshui City was bustling. All of its streets and alleys were connected and accessible, especially its main street, which ran from north to south. It was in no way inferior to the capital's Vermillion Bird Avenue and Luoyang's Avenue of the Eastern God. It was exceptionally wide, able to hold eight carriages running in tandem, and had a grand atmosphere.

But when Chen Changsheng's party appeared, the street suddenly seemed rather packed.

It wasn't that they were deliberately blocking those carriages and pedestrians. Instead, when they were still ten-some zhang away from them, the carriages and pedestrians would change their routes.

It was evident that these people were all going around them, keeping far away from where they walked.

They were like some massive rock within a river, pushing the water to the sides.

Other than a few curious children standing at the alleyways, no one even glanced at them. They even kept far away, like they were a flood or fierce beast.

The mood was very bizarre. Chen Changsheng even felt like the fragrance coming from the restaurants was shying away from them.

Zhexiu silently looked towards that white-walled, black-roofed building at the end of the street.

They were still very far away from this building, but they could already feel that ancient odor of history.

That was the renowned ancestral hall of the Tang clan. It was said that it was even older than the Imperial Palace in the capital.

Guan Feibai was also looking at that building, three fingers of his right hand slowly caressing the rather old hilt of his sword as his eyes slightly narrowed in thought.

If the information sent by the Li Palace was correct, that guy had been imprisoned there.

Two fingers were latched onto Chen Changsheng's sleeve. Nanke was not thinking of much. She just felt a little hungry and wanted to eat meat.

Chen Changsheng walked forward.

The crowd naturally parted, leaving a path down the middle, as if some divine force had parted a sea.

Chen Changsheng did not walk to that white-walled, black-roofed building at the end of the street. He stopped at a certain place, then turned and ascended a flight of stone steps.

Behind these stone steps was a secluded path that led into a forest. Deep within this forest was a Daoist church.

This church was the seat of Wenshui City's archbishop.

The door to the church slowly closed.

Chen Changsheng's party could no longer be seen.

The peddlers and pedestrians on the street suddenly stopped and looked towards the tightly shut door of the church.

For a moment, all was quiet, the only sounds being the distant barks of dogs and cries of children.

This was an even stranger sight, just like those nigh incomprehensible mime shows of Xuelao City.

After some time, the crowd turned their gazes away from the church and continued walking, returning to their lives.

The door to the Daoist church remained tightly shut, the forest silent.

No one knew what was happening within.

Twilight descended.

.....

.....

The people on the streets intentionally did not turn their gazes to the church within the forest again, but in another place, countless eyes were keeping watch.

The Wenshui passed through the city, and one part of it was very smooth and offered a sight of charming beauty. This part of the river just so happened to be the part behind the Daoist church.

On the opposite shore, seven peddlers, six government laborers, three fortune-tellers, two elders selling sesame seed candy, and one girl buying cosmetic powder were watching the back garden of the Daoist church.

There was also one bewhiskered military officer who would occasionally look in that direction.

The rays of the setting sun fell upon the mirror-like surface of the water, transforming into innumerable balls of fire that seemed to set the sky ablaze.

The reflections of this light fell on his face, transforming his beard into a burning bush.

Luo Bu recalled the Tang clan's famed Three Forms of Wenshui.

Those three sword techniques all had very pleasant names: Gathering Evening Clouds, Hanging Sunset, and A Stream of Maples.

Perhaps that famed ancestor of the Tang clan had seen just such a sight at this place and was deeply moved, creating this ingenious, beautiful, and moving sword style?

The Daoist church's back garden was serene as ever, with not even the shadow of a person visible.

Suddenly, someone began to play a zither, the strumming notes flowing out like water in a stream pleasant to the ear.

He turned his head and saw a blind zither player plucking his zither on the shore of the Wenshui.

Although it was dusk, the rays of light in the west seemed even brighter and rather dazzling. However, the blind zither player could not sense this. Unlike other people, he did not use his hand to block the sunlight, only squinted his eyes and lightly bobbed his head to the music, basking and intoxicated in the light.

At this sight, Luo Bu walked over and threw a few pieces of silver in front of the zither player.

The blind zither player seemed even more delighted at the clinking of silver. His eyebrows appeared to fly up and his fingers moved even faster across the strings. But the flavor of the tune

suddenly changed, becoming more gloomy. No longer was it the myriad golden leaves on the river, but old friends meeting at the city gate as the sun set in the distance.

Eyes zither player suspiciously

Chapter 818 – Singing in the Night Inside and Outside the Daoist Church

Luo Bu stood by the zither player and listened for a while, then suddenly began to sing along with the music.

The zither player played an obscure tune, but he sang an extremely famous song.

He also had a very forthright voice, which produced a unique flavor when it intersected with the willow trees and leftover snow of Wenshui City. As a result, he instantly attracted the attention of many people.

.....

.....

"My sword comes from the west

Your dress gracefully moves

Such petite cuteness

Flowing past the courtyard

I copy scriptures in the temple

But tomorrow I will practice punches and change muscles...

The spring mountain loves to smile

Tomorrow my journey will be even farther

Horse hooves turn into butterflies

The bow bends, an arrow flies, walking past the green forest

I am that scholar who goes to the capital to take the exam but does not study

I have come to Luoyang to see your reflection

The final words in the water, your lost visage in the sky

Lamenting your petite thinness

Drinking down in a single ladle your petite fullness."

(TN: This is an excerpt from the song "Yellow River", which is a song from the romance novel "偶然" by wuxia author Wen Ruian.)

.....

.....

The blind zither player played for a very long time, and Luo Bu also sang for a long time. More and more people gathered around them, and copper and silver pieces piled up in front of the zither player, glistening with a pleasing luster in the last smear of twilight.

The twilight gradually deepened until it turned into night. The shops and inns on both banks of the Wenshui began to light lanterns which twinkled like stars in the water.

Suddenly, the crowd began to buzz with shocked discussion. Everyone's gazes were drawn away from Luo Bu and the blind zither player, and focused on the opposite shore.

Over there was the back garden of the Daoist church.

Luo Bu slightly arched his brow and also turned to look over.

The Daoist church was bursting with light, clouds drifting around the peak of the church while ritualistic music with lofty and upright tones slowly rose up.

This was an announcement.

His Holiness the Pope had come to Wenshui.

The people along the river once more stopped moving, quietly standing and looking in the same manner as the crowd on the main street in the daytime.

The seven peddlers ceased their hollering, the six government laborers put down the chains in their hands, the three fortune-

tellers opened their eyes, the paper that the two elders used to wrap sesame seed candy lightly trembled in the wind, and the girl buying cosmetic powder went snow-white, as if she had already put five layers of powder on her face.

I didn't expect for him to be smart.

Seeing the boundless light from the opposite shore and hearing the ritualistic music coming from the church, Luo Bu thought to himself, Or perhaps he has a smart person at his side.

.....

.....

Wenshui City had an incredibly long history, and the Tang clan was even older than the Chen Imperial clan and the Liang clan.

As the head of the Four Great Clans and the richest clan in the world, the Wenshui Tangs led in countless industries: logistics, military armaments, foodstuffs, mining... as long as it was a truly important industry, one would always be able to see the Tang clan's subdued yet unignorable figure. It was this that established the Tang clan's status in the entire continent.

Up until today, no one knew just how much strength the Tang clan was concealing, as up until today, not a single faction had ever forced the Tang clan to use its full power. As a result, when discussing the Tang clan, people could only use a most ambiguous term to describe them: 'foundational resources'.

Foundational resources were at the foundation, just like the uncountable water grass at the bottom of the Wenshui. The common people only knew that it was there, but they had never personally seen it, leaving them only to imagine and speculate. As a result, the Tang clan became more and more mysterious, more and more terrifying.

But there was always some circumstantial evidence. For example, no one ever dared to swim or fish in the Wenshui, and both

Emperor Taizong and the monstrously powerful Tianhai Divine Empress had always attempted to placate or appease the Tang clan. It was easy to drown in the Wenshui and moving against the Tang clan was certain to throw the whole country into rebellion.

Chen Changsheng was the present Pope, the most esteemed human on the continent, but even he was powerless against the Tang clan.

If he had revealed his identity upon leaving the Mount Song Army headquarters and attempted to visit Wenshui City, the Tang clan had countless methods of courteously refusing him entrance to the city. Thus, he could only conceal his identity and visit Wenshui City as an ordinary traveler, even if Wenshui City knew long beforehand that he had arrived.

But now he was in Wenshui City. If he still wanted to conduct himself as before, attempting to secretly rescue Tang Thirty-Six from his imprisonment in the ancestral hall, the Tang clan really might have made him vanish in the darkness of the Wenshui. After all, this was Wenshui.

Thus, light exploded from the Daoist church while clouds ascended to the sky.

He announced his identity to all of Wenshui City.

No matter how dark and gloomy the Wenshui was, no matter how terrifying the grass at its foundation, would they dare move against him?

This was a very simple and straightforward announcement, but many people, including Luo Bu and the Tang clan, thought it was a very wise move.

In reality, however, this decision did not have much to do with Chen Changsheng. He was just following the directions on the letter.

The Daoist church had been quiet for half a day, but it was not

because he was discussing something. He had other important matters to attend to.

In the depths of winter, this forest was filled with verdant trees. It was clear that some sort of array was installed in the church that provided heat to the ground. Even in the capital's Li Palace, this way of doing things was rather extravagant. Only in Wenshui City was this sort of array rather commonplace, as this city was truly too prosperous.

A quiet and winding stone path ran through this forest. Starting from noon, the stone path came to be lined by bishops, separated at intervals of several zhang with one on each side, their expressions humble and solemn.

Farther along the path, the ranks of the bishops increased, until the holy gate leading to the rear hall, where four cardinals stood.

A pear tree was planted behind the holy gate, and underneath the pear tree was the door to the rear hall, outside which the Archbishop of Wenshui stood.

Several years ago, Chen Changsheng had visited Wenshui, and he had also stayed in the rear hall. He had already been appointed as Principal of the Orthodox Academy by the Pope and the entire continent knew that he was the future Pope, so the archbishop had naturally treated him with great hospitality. However, that treatment did not even compare to today's.

Wenshui City was not naturally a most important location to the Li Palace, and the post of archbishop there was assuredly a very cushy job. However, the Orthodoxy had not been very stable in these past few years, so this archbishop's ability to remain here for so many years meant that he was naturally no ordinary person. However, he quietly stood in front of this door, never showing any impatience regardless of how much time passed, or even moving his feet. He seemed so humble that it felt like he was about to lower himself into the earth.

Because Chen Changsheng was already the Pope.

Although they were well aware of this fact, the cardinals couldn't help but feel uncomfortable at this apparently deliberate disregard for their archbishop, though they dared not voice their complaints.

To their slight consolation, Zhexiu and Guan Feibai had also been barred from the rear hall and were currently whiling away their time in the forest.

Zhexiu of the Wolf tribe and Guan Feibai of Mount Li were naturally famous, and their relationship with the Pope was well-known.

Not even they could enter the hall, let alone anyone else.

Starting from noon, the door to the rear hall never once opened and not a single sound could be heard from within. No one knew what Chen Changsheng was up to.

Finally, at the period of deepest twilight, the trees lining the river and the roof of the hall seemed to simultaneously blaze, and then a real heat came from the hall.

This heat came from an actual fire, not from the array beneath the Daoist church. The leaves on the pear tree curled slightly.

The archbishop finally raised his head, his face showing a hint of anxiety as he looked towards the tightly shut door.

Chapter 819 – The Stamping of Hooves Disorders the Morning Light

Guan Feibai used his sleeve to wipe the sweat off his forehead, not knowing whether the sweat was because he was hot or because he was nervous.

"Is he making the Cinnabar Pill?"

His voice was somewhat hoarse and also very low, as he was worried that other people might hear.

Zhexiu also didn't know what was happening in the hall, but he had taken the Cinnabar Pill before and knew what it smelled like. He nodded.

Upon receiving this confirmation, Guan Feibai took a deep breath.

In the snowy plains of the north, the Cinnabar Pill was the hottest conversation topic, so it was only expected that he knew of this legendary and divine medicine that could save the dying and regrow bones.

But he was taking in this deep breath not out of shock, but because he had confirmed the truth of that other rumor.

So it really was Chen Changsheng that had refined the Cinnabar Pill. Then was it really made with his blood?

Half a year ago, one of his martial uncles from the Mount Li Sword Hall engaged in bloody battle with the twenty-first Demon General outside the Black Mountain Army headquarters. He came away from the battle with one of his arms severed and his blood nearly spent. Even the Sacred Light technique was ineffective, but at the final and most desperate juncture, one Cinnabar Pill had brought him back.

As he thought about this, Guan Feibai truly didn't know how he

should face Chen Changsheng.

.....

.....

The door to the rear hall was finally opened. A wave of heat surged out, causing the pear tree to shed its leaves and making it feel like midsummer.

Chen Changsheng walked out with Nanke's support, his face pale as if he had just started recovering from some terrible disease.

The Archbishop of Wenshui hurriedly stepped forward to welcome him.

Chen Changsheng handed him a small bottle.

The bottle naturally contained the incomparably precious Cinnabar Pills.

For a bit more than a year, Chen Changsheng had been providing a small bottle of Cinnabar Pills for the soldiers on the frontline every month.

There was a limit to his blood.

Time-wise, this month's Cinnabar Pills should have been made a couple of weeks ago and been completely distributed. However, he had taken heavy wounds from the Demon Lord in the mountains and lost a great deal of blood. Afterwards, he was recovering in Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, so it was simply impossible for him to make them.

He had never once said anything about it, but he was actually rather anxious, because he knew that there were many soldiers teetering on the verge of death in many places, like Blue Pass, Snowhold Pass, Cong Province, and Black Mountain, that were waiting for the Cinnabar Pill. It was those people who were truly anxious.

Thus, by the time he left Hanqiu City, he had already sent a

secret message to Wenshui to have the Daoist church here prepare the appropriate ingredients. Upon his arrival today, he disregarded the fact that his injuries had not fully recovered and began to make the pills.

Now that this bottle of Cinnabar Pills had finally been finished, it would naturally be sent to the armies on the frontlines.

At the very beginning, the Orthodoxy's Hall of Illustrious Persons had been in charge of distribution, but this task was later passed to the Tang clan. He was currently in Wenshui, but he had no intention of continuing to let the Tang clan handle this matter, as everything that had happened that night in the mountains had been caused by the Tang clan, and the Tang clan clearly did not care for the kindness he was expressing through the Cinnabar Pill.

Chen Changsheng ordered, "Send someone to deliver this overnight to Hanqiu City. Find the supervisor of Scholartree Manor. They know how to distribute the pills."

It was very quiet. The archbishop did not reply, nor did he take the small bottle.

He had no intention of defying this divine edict, nor was he weighing pros and cons. He was simply too shocked.

There was some very important information contained in this order, and one piece of information was certain to stun the entire continent.

Wang Po had returned to Tianliang County.

Whether or not he himself had returned, Scholartree Manor had arrived, which meant that he had as well.

Everyone knew that Scholartree Manor was Wang Po.

Yet most shocking of all to this archbishop was not this news, but the small bottle itself.

In sending someone to deliver this bottle overnight to Hanqiu

City, he would be given plenty of opportunities to pull underhanded tricks, if he was willing to do it.

The archbishop's complexion incessantly shifted, one moment red and the next moment white, and then finally returning to serenity.

He took the small bottle without even the smallest tremble.

"I will not betray Your Holiness's trust."

.....

.....

Zhexiu looked at Chen Changsheng's wan complexion and cautioned, "Blood can replenish itself, but if you keep this up, it will have a large effect on your cultivation."

Chen Changsheng replied, "I eat a lot of spirit fruits and precious herbs every day. The problem shouldn't be too great."

Zhexiu replied, "If you want to be a Saint, it will be a massive problem."

Chen Changsheng fell quiet, not responding.

Zhexiu stared into his eyes and said, "Did she not stop you?"

Chen Changsheng knew that he was not referring to Xu Yourong or the writer of the letter, but the little Black Dragon.

He couldn't help but smile upon recalling that intense quarrel he had with her at the very start.

Zhexiu continued, "Compared to saving those people, it's far more important to this world that you get stronger."

Chen Changsheng's gaze paused on the pear tree outside the door as he said, "I understand this reasoning, but... It would be fine if I had never thought about this method, but since I now know that as long as I use some of my blood every month, I can save several dozen lives, it's truly difficult for me to not do it."

Guan Feibai, who had been quiet all this time, replied, "That's reasonable. I would also find myself in a difficult position if I were you."

Zhexiu had grown up in the harsh and cruel wastelands of the north and found it impossible to understand the thought processes of these disciples from the famous righteous sects of the south. Shaking his head, he said no more.

"When you were making medicine, the Daoist church announced your arrival to Wenshui."

Guan Feibai turned to Chen Changsheng and asked, "What I don't understand is that even though you've revealed your identity, making the Tang clan unable to touch you, how can you rescue Tang Tang? Even if you personally pay a visit, if they don't let you in, what can you do? Not even the Pope can force their way into the ancestral hall."

"I also don't know. I'll look at the situation tomorrow."

Chen Changsheng glanced at the night sky. Seeing the countless twinkling stars, he surmised that tomorrow would be a clear day.

The weather was warm and pleasant during the day, but a wind suddenly blew in over the night. A winter wind came down from the mountains of the north, entering the city through the Wenshui and lingering around the Daoist church.

The pear tree lightly swayed, once more shedding a few of its leaves. It looked rather dreary, apparently forecasting a possible change in weather.

.....

.....

The change came on the morning of the next day.

It was not a sudden sprinkling of snow, nor was it a blinding wind. It was countless claps of thunder.

The thunderous stamping of hooves shattered the morning light and made the earth quake, sending the plains into turmoil. Wenshui City rang with warning bells, and the city gates, which had not closed in several centuries, closed with unimaginable speed.

The various types of defensive divine crossbows mounted on the city walls turned to face the northern plains. Countless somber and powerful strands of Qi shot into the air, a sign that the countless arrays within the city gate, walls, and even underground were beginning to move.

Just by seeing the number of defensive divine crossbows, the density of the arrays, and the flying carriages streaking through the sky, one understood that Wenshui City's defenses were incredibly powerful, so far surpassing the norm that they were even comparable to Luoyang's defenses.

Even more awe-inspiring was the fact that, although they were visibly shocked at the thundering hooves, none of the soldiers by the city gate, the fast-reacting Tang clan guards, or even the ordinary peddlers and servants panicked. In a very orderly fashion, they quickly retreated into the city.

It was obvious that although Wenshui City had never once been sacked in these countless years, it had never forgotten how to fight.

Without even considering the unfathomable 'foundational resources' of the Tang clan, just the staunch defenses of the city and the well-trained soldiers and populace ensured that any attacker would have to pay a most miserable price. Even the most bloodthirsty, cruel, and ruthless demon wolf cavalry would not dare charge straight into the fray. They would assuredly pause outside the range of those several hundred divine crossbows.

As expected, the thundering hooves gradually halted, that black tide stopping on the plains a thousand zhang out from the city.

Chapter 820 – The Spring Breeze Enters the Old City

The black tide halted on the distant plains. Even with the specially constructed Thousand Li Mirror of the Tang clan, it was very difficult to clearly tell who these cavalry belonged to.

After a short time, a hundred-some cavalry broke off from the army and galloped towards Wenshui City, completely disregarding the divine crossbows mounted on the walls. Despite the fact that they had been drilled countless times, the soldiers and guards on the walls still grew nervous at this sight. After all, they still did not have any real experience.

The master of the city was hurriedly escorted to the city walls by his subordinates. He hadn't even had time to tidy his clothes, much less put on armor.

As he looked at that distant tide of cavalry and the squad of a hundred-some cavalry getting closer and closer, the city master grew paler and paler.

The hundred-some cavalry had already entered the range of the divine crossbows, but he did not dare give the order to fire. Sweating profusely, he turned to the Tang clan guards and asked in panic, "Where's the head clan? Why hasn't the head clan sent anybody?"

The city master of Wenshui City was appointed by the Imperial Court, but he was keenly aware that he could never be the master of this city.

For thousands and thousands of years, the master of this city had always been one surname: the Tang clan.

Quite some time had passed since the first warning bells had rung out. No matter how slow their response, the Tang clan should have sent someone by now.

Why was it that the only people on the walls were those guards, but not a single important figure of the Tang clan?

An advisor stared at the approaching cavalry and thought of a possibility. He whispered, "If there's no activity from the head clan, it means that there must be no problem."

The city master found these words rather reasonable. Wiping the cold sweat off his face, he shakily asked, "Then... just who has come?"

.....

.....

Time passed and the hundred-some cavalry reached the walls of Wenshui City.

No battle took place, because the people on the walls very quickly realized the identity of these visitors.

These visitors to Wenshui City were not an expeditionary army of the Demon race, but two thousand escorting cavalry.

Their mission was to escort three Sacred Hall archbishops into Wenshui City.

The reason the three Sacred Hall archbishops had come to Wenshui City was even simpler: attending upon the Pope.

No matter how upset the soldiers and citizens of Wenshui City were by this morning's abrupt visit, they had no justification to bar the archbishops from entering the city.

The vast majority of the two thousand cavalry remained on the plains, not showing any hostility.

The heavy city gate which had just closed not long ago slowly opened.

Two large carriages escorted by one hundred cavalry entered the city, watched by countless people with mixed emotions.

Archbishop An Lin spoke a few words to the city master through the curtain, showing no intention of leaving the carriage.

The people on the streets looked with interest at the figure in the carriage, some even piously prostrating and praying on the ground.

Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Baishi were still sitting in the same carriage.

"The Tang clan's reaction is very fast. Ah, they're not that easy to attack."

Linghai Zhiwang expressionlessly said as he peered through the curtain, examining those Tang clan guards that were clearly not part of the Imperial Court's army.

There were many deeper meanings contained in this comment, but Daoist Baishi only gave a faint smile, nothing more.

Linghai Zhiwang glanced at him and said, "Wenshui City has never encountered the fires of war, so why is the Tang clan so wary and careful? They even don't mind exceeding the norms and installing so many divine crossbows and arrays, and why so many private troops? Could it be... that they're thinking of rebellion?"

The meaning was more explicit here. Daoist Baishi's smile faded, but he still said nothing, as he didn't know how to respond.

.....

.....

Two thousand cavalry escorted three Prefects of the Orthodoxy to Wenshui City.

They had ample reasons, as they had to ensure the Pope's safety.

No one could voice any objections.

But no one would forget a crucial fact: the Li Palace had not informed Wenshui City beforehand.

Taking without asking was stealing; coming without asking was a surprise attack.

Two thousand cavalry had suddenly appeared outside Wenshui City, their thundering hooves tearing apart the morning light.

Although nothing happened, all of Wenshui City felt nervous and uneasy on that morning.

A thousand years ago, the Demon Army moved down from the north and placed Luoyang under prolonged siege, their vanguard only three-hundred-some li from the capital. And yet they had never managed to reach Wenshui City.

Even further in the past, in that chaotic era in which warlords struggled for power, the continent was alight with beacons of fire, the people were displaced, and vast tracts of land were turned into scorched earth. Only Wenshui City did not suffer any attack, but quietly watched as the world roiled in upheaval.

This was the first time in countless years that Wenshui City had seen an army.

Just why had the Orthodoxy acted this way? To show off their might to the Tang clan? Were they worried about the Pope's safety? Or did they want to frighten some people in Wenshui City?

As imperial envoy, the Prince of Zhongshan had not immediately returned to the capital after leaving the Mount Song Army headquarters. Instead, he had represented the emperor and inspected the other armies in the north. When he received this news, he was at Blue Pass, and the first question he thought of was not any of the above but rather, the Orthodoxy's people didn't go to Cong Province?

One day, Linghai Zhiwang and two more Prefects of the Orthodoxy had brought two thousand cavalry and assailed the Mount Song with their thunderous momentum. Using the assassination attempt on the Pope, they had wrested away the

position of Divine General of the Mount Song Army. A large percentage of their success could be attributed to the fact that they had arrived too suddenly.

The two thousand Orthodoxy cavalry had been garrisoned on the outskirts of Xunyang City and there was nothing but wasteland between there and the Mount Song Army headquarters, so it was not too inconceivable for their movements to be hidden from the Imperial Court. The question was, however, when had those three Orthodoxy Prefects left the Li Palace? How had no one in the capital noticed?

The Imperial Court would naturally not permit such a thing to happen again. Once the three Orthodoxy Prefects took their two thousand cavalry and left the Mount Song Army headquarters, they were constantly watched by the Great Zhou Army. Everyone knew that they were currently nearing the Cong Province Army headquarters.

This was something that many people in the court had predicted.

The Orthodoxy could not have sent out such a large force for just the Mount Song Army headquarters.

The Cong Province Army headquarters was located in the remote west, life there was difficult, and it was also extremely important. Critically, this was where Xue Xingchuan had begun his rise. Even though he had been dead for three years and the Imperial Court had executed many purges, it was still impossible to completely obliterate his influence.

From every angle, the Cong Province Army headquarters should have been a goal of the Orthodoxy.

Who could have expected that the three Orthodoxy Prefects and their two thousand cavalry would cross the lifeless mountain and desert overnight and suddenly appear outside Wenshui City!

Just what did the Orthodoxy want to do? Did that young Pope

really go crazy and intend to massacre Wenshui?

The Prince of Zhongshan finally began to ponder these questions, his expression turning colder and colder.

He simply would not believe such an absurd conjecture, as he was very sure that the young Pope could not pull off such a feat.

And massacring Wenshui with just two thousand cavalry? This underestimated the wisdom of the Pope and the unfathomable strength of the Tang clan far too much.

At this moment, a burst of cheers suddenly arose from the streets of the army headquarters.

The Prince of Zhongshan slightly frowned and asked, "What happened?"

Though a few moments had passed, the cheers outside had no intention of stopping, and they were actually getting louder, as if all of Blue Pass was celebrating something.

Divine General Jian Xi walked into the military hall and said with a slightly gloomy voice, "We've just received news that the new batch of Cinnabar Pills will start being distributed tomorrow."

The Prince of Zhongshan's gaze grew more and more serene as he thought, I don't know how intelligent His Holiness is, but his bearing is truly unusual.

.....

.....

Wenshui was one of the few cities in the world that could be called ancient, and in the depths of winter, when the snow and yellow leaves contrasted against each other, it appeared even more serene.

Anyone who saw its ancient mottled walls or those signs that were unchanged despite hundreds of years of wind and rain could feel the thick aura of history.

Upon recalling that noble clan within the city, this thick aura of history would be supplemented by a power that had lasted through the tribulations of time.

Even Linghai Zhiwang ceased to be as irritable upon entering the city, becoming somewhat taciturn.

He raised the curtain, first seeing those people, kneeling or standing, on the road, and then seeing the light on the water.

Wenshui City was further north than the capital, but the river that was its namesake did not freeze even in the depths of winter, seeming like it could flow on forever.

Only the snow-speckled grass by the river and two or three yellow flowers that had clearly been frozen to death were proof of nature's nigh unstoppable laws.

The carriage stopped outside the Daoist church. Linghai Zhiwang ascended the stone steps, with Daoist Baishi and Archbishop An Lin following behind him.

At the end of this quiet and secluded stone path was the holy gate leading to the rear hall.

A pear tree was planted behind the gate, and under the tree stood a young man.

Linghai Zhiwang did not like this young man.

He had never liked him.

Even after he discovered that the young man was a legitimate successor of the Orthodoxy, he still found it impossible to understand why that Pope that he had revered above all else had chosen this person as his successor.

In his view, although this young man was certainly no coward, he was still lacking an edge. He was lifeless and showed no preference for anything.

A lack of preference meant that he did not like or dislike, and

without fierce likes and dislikes, one would not understand what 'responsibility' meant.

At this moment, when he saw that figure under the pear tree, he finally understood something.

The young man had never been lifeless.

He had been calm and serene.

This young man was like a small stream.

The stream might have been somewhat shallow, but it was very clear. One could see the fish at the bottom and their own reflection.

The stream seemed gentle and soft, but it was also incredibly tenacious. Not even the sharpest sword could sever its flow.

The stream seemed very calm, but in reality, it contained an unimaginably powerful surging momentum. It could cleave through mountains, open up new lands, and flow west until the ocean.

It was just like how everyone knew that he should not have come to Wenshui City, that it was not to his advantage to come to Wenshui City, but he still had come.

Linghai Zhiwang finally understood the Pope's choice.

He calmly prostrated himself.

Daoist Baishi and An Lin glanced at each other with surprise on their faces, and then they prostrated as well.

The young man turned around and said, "Rise."

A cool breeze blew over, causing countless tiny flowers to fall from the tree and rain over his body. As they drifted onto his shoulders, they seemed pure and clean, like fresh flakes of snow.

Little white flowers rained down, covering the ground.

It was currently the frigid winter, so why was there such a

beautiful sight?

Perhaps it was because he had made pills yesterday, causing the garden to suddenly warm and life to gradually bloom.

Thus, it was like a spring breeze had come in the night and caused all the flowers of the pear tree to blossom.

(End of Book 5 – The Yellow Blooms of the Battlefield)

Book 6: Fierce the West Wind

Fierce the west wind, geese fly across the vast sky, crying out to the frosty morning moon.

Under the frosty morning moon, horse hooves disorderly stamp, the horn sobs.

In vain they boast that the grand pass is a wall of iron, urging us to stride across its summit.

Striding across its summit, the green mountains like the ocean waves, the sunset red as blood.

—Loushan Pass, Mao Zedong, 1935

Chapter 821 – The Palm Falls Toward the Stone

Linghai Zhiwang prostrated towards Chen Changsheng beneath the pear tree, and then rose.

This entire process happened very quickly.

He had gotten up somewhat faster than he normally did, which could mean that he was making efficient movements or that he did not care.

Many people, especially the important figures within the Li Palace, knew that Linghai Zhiwang had never liked the Pope and held a faint hostility towards him.

Daoist Baishi and An Lin saw this sight out of the corner of their eyes and did not find it strange.

Linghai Zhiwang had stood up, but Daoist Baishi and An Lin were still prostrating, resulting in a difference of height.

It was similar to the difference in positions between the pear tree and Chen Changsheng.

The caress of the cool breeze caused countless white flowers to drift down onto Chen Changsheng's head and shoulders.

Linghai Zhiwang's right hand also drifted down, straight towards Daoist Baishi's head.

A cold wind howled, the trees swayed, and the pear blossoms frenziedly danced.

This wind even affected the distant Wenshui, driving the waters into turmoil. The water grass at the bottom of the river began to madly writhe about like countless snakes.

Linghai Zhiwang had struck too abruptly. None of the people in front of the hall had time to react.

An Lin caught the palm descending like a bolt of lightning out of the corner of her eye. Abnormally shocked, she wanted to stop him, but was already too late.

But Daoist Baishi apparently had already prepared himself.

He still maintained his prostrating posture, but his right palm had already left the ground, flipping over like duckweed being blown about the surface of the water.

With a clap, the two palms met over Daoist Baishi's head.

The stone pavement in front of the hall quaked and sank several inches!

The holy gate was blown about by a violent gale, causing it to creak and seem on the verge of collapse.

Linghai Zhiwang's body swayed and he retreated two steps. Countless pure strands of Qi seeped out of his divine robe and tore through the air.

Daoist Baishi stood up, his face a deep red, looking like countless tiny drops of blood were seeping out of his skin.

An Lin was thrown into an even deeper shock, as the result of this clash of palms had completely exceeded her expectations.

Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Baishi had similar cultivations, both being at the peak of Star Condensation.

Even if Daoist Baishi had been vigilant this entire time, Linghai Zhiwang's strike had been too sudden, completely in harmony with the principles of the world. It could be considered the strongest attack Linghai Zhiwang had made in his entire life, yet it was unable to heavily wound Daoist Baishi, just barely gaining the upper hand. Why was this?

An Lin sensed the divine Qi emanating from Daoist Baishi's body, her face paling as she thought of a certain possibility.

Daoist Baishi was not bleeding, but he knew that he had suffered

significant injuries from Linghai Zhiwang's sinister and full-force ambush. He had to leave immediately.

He had a deep understanding of the people present and knew that this was his last chance to leave.

Linghai Zhiwang needed time to settle his true essence and An Lin had just sobered up and had not entered into a fighting state. The young man covered in a fierce sword intent that had just walked out of the hall was presumably a young expert of the Mount Li Sword Sect, but the Mount Li Sword Sect was not skilled at the art of pursuit, so this young man probably could not stop him.

As for that other person... He shot a glance at Chen Changsheng beneath the pear tree and thought, you still haven't fully recovered, so even if you use your ten thousand swords, how can you stop me?

He gave a snort, then activated a movement technique. Transformed into a wisp of smoke beneath the winter sun, he shot out of the church.

As the fastest of the Orthodoxy's Prefects, possessing the most secretive of movement techniques, he had conjectured correctly: no one present could stop him.

But he did not know of one thing: two more people had accompanied Chen Changsheng from the Mount Song Army headquarters to Wenshui City.

The wisp of smoke traversed the forested garden, yet it found it impossible to leave. Wherever he went, a little girl would always appear in front of him.

Daoist Baishi was forced to appear. As he looked at the girl in front of him, his eyes brimmed with shock.

This girl had a childish face and dull eyes. It didn't even look like she could think.

So how can she tell where I'm going? Why is she so fast!

What made him even more uneasy was that when he was flying through the forest earlier, he felt like a cold wind had been blowing at his neck.

It was like someone had been behind him this entire time...

He knew that he had to use all his strength.

A divine Qi erupted from his Daoist robes, countless pure rays of light shooting out from his palm.

This was a white stone, perfectly round. Those who had visited the Heaven Lake of Mount Han would recognize it as a Heavenstone.

This Heavenstone was inlaid with an extremely complex pattern of black gold, forming an array. It looked extremely beautiful, perhaps worthy of being called a perfect intersection of man and nature.

This was one of the precious treasures of the Orthodoxy: the Falling Star Stone.

.....

.....

An Lin's conjecture was proved at this sight, throwing her into a fury.

Daoist Baishi had been able to preserve the majority of his strength after taking Linghai Zhiwang's full-force sneak attack precisely because he held the Falling Star Stone in his palm.

The Falling Star Stone was the treasure of the Orthodoxy controlled by Daoist Baishi. An Lin, Linghai Zhiwang and the other Prefects had their own treasures.

These treasures were divine artifacts, and formed extremely critical parts of the Li Palace's array. They were of utmost importance to the Orthodoxy.

Without the Pope's order, no one, including the Orthodoxy Prefects that wielded the treasures, could take them out of the Li Palace.

Daoist Baishi had secretly brought the Falling Star Stone with him. Regardless of his intentions, he had contravened the laws of the church!

An Lin waved her right hand, causing her belt to fly off and carry countless pear blossoms as it attempted to surround Daoist Baishi.

"Did you think you could keep me here with just that?" Daoist Baishi shouted as he stared at the little girl in front of him.

In truth, his question was also aimed at that phantom-like person behind him, and at An Lin, and even more at Chen Changsheng.

As he spoke, he smashed the Falling Star Stone down to the ground.

An Lin knew that this was not good. Although her belt had not finished establishing an array, she charged into the forest.

The Falling Star Stone fell against the ground. It did not make a single sound, and not even the petals and leaves trembled in the slightest.

An archaic and timeworn power suddenly manifested.

The wind suddenly began to blow towards the Falling Star Stone, as did the petals and leaves on the ground.

The Falling Star Stone seemed to transform into a massive vortex, swallowing up everything it touched. Even the surrounding laws of the world began to twist.

An incredibly deep black hole appeared over the ground. It seemed just one zhang in radius, but also boundless and infinite.

The Falling Star Stone floated in the middle of it, exuding a faint light and appearing like a real star.

The wind, flowers, and leaves continued to sink inside, vanishing

without a trace.

"Stop him!" An Lin hurriedly shouted.

The Falling Star Stone was truly worthy of its status as a divine artifact and treasure of the Orthodoxy. It had actually torn open space and opened a path to a different place!

Daoist Baishi expressionlessly glanced at her.

The Falling Star Stone had already completely activated. Neither the girl in front of him nor that phantom individual behind could stop him.

He walked towards that dark path.

If all went as expected, he would soon appear several hundred li away on the plains.

But... the unexpected occurred.

His feet had clearly stepped into the dark path, but why did he feel like he was still stepping onto mud?

Why could he still feel petals and leaves under his feet?

Chapter 822 – Like a Mountain! Like a Sea! Like a Banner!

Daoist Baishi looked around in shock, realizing that he was still outside the Daoist church, still within the forest.

The little girl was still in front of him, the cold Qi still at his neck.

What was going on? The Falling Star Stone had clearly torn through space, so why had he not been transported elsewhere?

Daoist Baishi looked down towards his feet and his face suddenly paled.

The Falling Star Stone was still floating in the black space.

But the black space was visibly shrinking.

A divine strength arising from some place was beating against this black space like endless waves of water.

The Falling Star Stone's twisting of the world's laws had completely lost its effect. The petals and leaves ceased to be drawn towards it, their progress halted.

Just like how he could no longer enter that path, only remain where he stood.

Just where did these endless waves of strength come from? Why were they so divine and majestic? Why could not even the Falling Star Stone resist?

Daoist Baishi suddenly turned, his gaze following the waves of water on the ground into the distance, ultimately resting behind the holy gate, underneath the pear tree.

Chen Changsheng stood beneath the pear tree, calmly looking back, apparently unconcerned that he might escape.

He gripped a Divine Staff in hand.

This staff symbolized the most hallowed will of the Orthodoxy.

The bottom of the Divine Staff lightly rested in the mud, yet it seemed unshakable.

Countless strands of divine Qi spread out from the Divine Staff like waves of water.

The petals and leaves on the ground slowly floated upwards, rising three feet above the ground, but no more than that.

The water grass at the bottom of the river slowly floated up to three feet from the water's surface, no longer so reluctant to see the light of day.

All this happened with an absolutely harmonious beauty.

The pinnacle of beauty was serenity, and the sea of stars was serene, and to be serene was to be divine.

The entire Daoist church and the forest and river around it had become a sea of stars.

Any divine strength that encountered this sea of stars would become a part of it, wallowing or enraptured until it disappeared or became one.

The Falling Star Stone was a treasure of the Orthodoxy, formed from the wisdom of countless generations of the Li Palace's sages. When encountering the Pope's Divine Staff, how could it possibly fight back?

Daoist Baishi could clearly sense that the Falling Star Stone was separating from his Dao heart and finally understood what was happening, causing him to grow even paler. Surrounded by experts of the Orthodoxy, even with the Falling Star Stone in hand, he could only think about escape. If even the Falling Star Stone was taken from him, what chance did he have left?

He could no longer keep anything back. He forcefully severed his connection with the Falling Star Stone, receiving the wounds brought about by the backlash from the divine Dao, swallowing down that mouthful of sweet blood. His true essence surged as he

pushed his movement technique to its absolute limits. Brushing past the small girl, he transformed into a violent gale as he charged out of the forest.

With a flick of An Lin's finger, the belt moved with the wind, carrying countless petals in an enchanting sight.

Daoist Baishi was not enchanted, but his vision was obscured.

More importantly, the belt and all the petals it stirred seemed to effect some sort of change in the orientation of the forest.

When the petals scattered, Daoist Baishi did not see the stone steps leading out of the forest, but Linghai Zhiwang's utterly emotionless face.

After launching the first sneak attack, Linghai Zhiwang had retreated, after which he had not attacked again, waiting all the way until this moment.

He would not give Daoist Baishi another chance.

The iron ruler in his hands, which had been accumulating energy all this time, smashed towards Daoist Baishi through the petals.

For an instant, the pitch-black ruler seemed to glimmer with the light of countless stars.

A muffled boom.

The iron ruler sundered Daoist Baishi's defense and fiercely struck him on the shoulder.

His shoulder bone was instantly broken in two while his Ethereal Palace was given a nasty shock. He could no longer endure, and vomited blood into the sky.

Just when he was prepared to explode his true essence and break free from Linghai Zhiwang, he suddenly felt a chill at his waist.

He was very familiar with this chill, which made him all the more frightened.

This chill had been following behind him the entire time like some ghost was breathing down his neck.

Now, however, this chill appeared at his waist.

There was a very soft sound.

It was that extremely clichéd metaphor again.

Like a leather bag full of wine being pierced.

The tip of a sword poked out of Daoist Baishi's chest.

The tip of this sword was actually not that sharp, seeming more like the jagged edge leftover after the sword was chopped at by some sharp weapon. A few very complex patterns decorated the surface of the sword.

After being dyed in blood, these patterns seemed particularly monstrous and strange.

Logically speaking, even if a powerful expert like Daoist Baishi were to be stabbed through the chest by a sword, they should still have had the ability to fight.

But for some inexplicable reason, he rapidly weakened, as if the countless strands of Demon Qi carried by the sword were nibbling away at his life.

Daoist Baishi lowered his head to his chest. When he set eyes on the sword, his confusion turned into shock, a pained and despairing call bursting from his lips.

He had seen a picture of this sword in the Daoist scriptures and recognized it.

The Demon Commander's Banner Sword that had been missing for several centuries!

.....

.....

Divine might like a sea!

Iron ruler like a mountain!

Demon sword like a banner!

No matter how valiant Daoist Baishi was, after receiving such terrifying attacks three times in succession, he finally could endure no longer. Spitting out blood, he dropped down on one knee, giving up any efforts to resist.

With difficulty, he raised his head and discovered that the little girl was still standing in front of him, a dull expression on her face.

This girl never once attacked, but wherever he went, she would always appear.

This method of not attacking was even more frightening than attacking.

Who was this little girl? Why did she possess such terrifying speed and movement techniques? Daoist Baishi stared into her eyes and suddenly thought of a possibility. Incredulity welled in his eyes, and he turned to the holy gate and harshly called out, "You actually dare to keep her at your side!"

Chen Changsheng did not respond to his exclamation. After putting away the Divine Staff, he said his thanks to Guan Feibai.

From the moment Linghai Zhiwang began his sneak attack, Guan Feibai subconsciously positioned himself in front of Chen Changsheng and gripped his sword, despite the fact that he did not know what was happening.

After all, Chen Changsheng had still not fully recovered, and he had also lost too much blood, so he needed to be protected.

Only now did he faintly begin to understand, and the hand gripping the hilt of his sword began to shake.

Everything had happened too suddenly.

Even someone like him, who had a sword intent as steady as a mountain, couldn't help but feel nervous upon realizing that he

had just taken part in a major affair of the Orthodoxy.

An Lin had heard Daoist Baishi's words and also vaguely understood. She looked towards the dull-faced little girl, hesitating to speak.

Linghai Zhiwang had assuredly guessed at it, but he was utterly unaffected by Daoist Baishi's words. He impassively asked, "Since you already guessed that we knew and still dared to enter with us into the city, was it the venerable Daoist master or the Tang clan that guaranteed your safety? Or was it because you thought that with the Falling Star Stone in hand, you could do whatever you wanted?"

The front of Daoist Baishi's clothes was stained in blood, making him appear rather wretched, but his stance remained unyielding. He harshly responded, "I truly did not expect that the Divine Staff could suppress the Falling Star Stone. It seems that this is how the Pope controls the six halls, but so what? Are you going to have killed me on the spot?"

Chapter 823 – Discussing Punishment

Daoist Baishi was the Archbishop of the Hall of Literary Glory, possessing a most esteemed status within the Orthodoxy. According to the rules written in the Daoist scriptures, even if an important figure of his level contravened the laws of the church, in order to bestow punishment upon him, the Pope would first have to open a meeting in the Great Hall of Light. Before the church, they would announce his crimes and then have the Hall of Drifting Clouds decide the punishment.

This was how the previous Pope had banished Mu Jiushi from the Li Palace.

The current Pope, Chen Changsheng, had not returned to the capital for three years now. Even if he returned to the capital to discuss Daoist Baishi's punishment, there might be people who would stand on Daoist Baishi's side, or at the very least request that he be spared the death penalty. Also, Shang Xingzhou was in the capital, and he would certainly not watch as Daoist Baishi was killed.

Chen Changsheng gave no assessment of Daoist Baishi's words, only calmly gazed at him and asked, "Why?"

It had already been three years since he left the capital, and the Li Palace had been placed under enormous pressure in the meantime. Although Grass Moon Hall, the Moss Institute, and the rest of the six halls were sealed, they could not prevent that pressure from sneaking in with the wind. After the confluence of the north and south, the Great Zhou Imperial Court became increasingly powerful, and even more crucially, Shang Xingzhou was also a legitimate successor of the Orthodoxy, as well as a true Saint. With the departure of the Pope and Archbishop Mei Lisha to the sea of stars, there was no one else older than him in the Orthodoxy, no one with as long a record of service. Even Pope Chen Changsheng was his student.

In these circumstances, how could a few people within the Orthodoxy not have other thoughts?

He had originally thought that Daoist Siyuan and Linghai Zhiwang were the two most likely to follow his master, as they had a grudge against him, but he had never expected it to be Daoist Baishi. After all, Daoist Baishi had been one of the witnesses to that final order and had always been silent and subdued. It was simply impossible to think that he could betray the church.

"Why? Because I must consider the future of the Orthodoxy, the good of the Human race." Daoist Baishi stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes. "The Orthodoxy is not the church of one man, but the sect of millions upon millions of believers. It absolutely cannot move according to the will of only Your Holiness alone, not unless you are a true Saint. Unfortunately, although you have outstanding talent, even having the chance of becoming the youngest true Saint in history, you and I are both aware that the venerable Daoist master will not give you this chance, and you also know that you will never have this chance. Thus, after three years, you could no longer keep silent and decided that you might as well start stirring a storm."

Chen Changsheng was quiet for a while, then replied, "I believed that many people within the Orthodoxy were anticipating the day that I finally stood up once more."

"Those people are all fools." Daoist Baishi made no attempt to hide his scorn as he shot a glance at Linghai Zhiwang. It was evident that the once-new faction of the Orthodoxy led by Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan had maintained a very radical stance, hoping that Chen Changsheng could reign over the world as Pope as quickly as possible.

Daoist Baishi continued, "Why did His Holiness choose you as his successor? Because he felt his martial nephew was very similar to him. But now that you've stood and begun relying on the authority of Pope, begun relying on these so-called strategies, in an attempt

to win this war against the Imperial Court, you become less and less similar to his esteemed self, becoming more and more like your master. And if you want to become a person like your master, just how can you possibly defeat him?"

After saying this, he turned to Linghai Zhiwang and An Lin, and yelled, "Did none of you ever think of this question? Why is it that the Orthodoxy must consign itself to eternal damnation because he inexplicably wants to disobey his teacher? This being the case, why don't we just welcome the venerable Daoist master as His Holiness the Pope!"

All was quiet outside the church. The tree behind the holy gate lightly swayed in the wind, casting off that white flower that was the first to bloom last night.

Chen Changsheng's gaze fell on the indistinct and distant figures of the priests in the forest. He was quiet for a few moments and then finally said, "Perhaps you do not understand me very well."

Daoist Baishi did not expect to hear this sort of answer. He froze for a few moments, then became cold and unyielding once more. "It doesn't matter. The most you can do right now is deprive me of my position as archbishop. You can even treat me like Mu Jiushi and cripple my cultivation, but on the day that the venerable Daoist master returns to the Li Palace, I will be waiting there for you."

An Lin was silent, but Linghai Zhiwang said, "I've worked with you for several decades, but I never realized that you were such a stupid person."

Daoist Baishi gave him a cold glare and asked, "What sort of crime do you want to press? Scheming to harm His Holiness the Pope? Just like at the Mount Song Army headquarters?"

Linghai Zhiwang replied, "Crimes are not pressed by others, but committed by oneself."

Daoist Baishi expressionlessly warned, "Do not forget, this is Wenshui."

Wenshui was the territory of the Tang clan.

No matter how powerful the Orthodoxy was, if they wanted to execute Daoist Baishi here, they could not possibly hide it from the Tang clan. This also meant that if Chen Changsheng wanted to preserve the dignity of the church laws, he could only arrest Daoist Baishi and perhaps even sever his cultivation, but he could not have him executed.

At this moment, footsteps came from the forest. The Archbishop of Wenshui arrived in front of the church, letter in hand.

The archbishop had his head lowered, not even glancing at Daoist Baishi's blood-covered figure, nor revealing any sort of surprise. Just like usual, he was calm and meek.

"Your Holiness, the letter you were waiting for has arrived."

Chen Changsheng took the envelope and opened it, reading the letter within.

Linghai Zhiwang and An Lin turned to look, as did Guan Feibai and Zhexiu. Even Daoist Baishi, whose fate still hung in the balance, cast his gaze over.

They all knew that someone had been exchanging letters with Chen Changsheng this entire time. The matter of the Mount Song Army headquarters and his route to Wenshui had all been decided by the writer of those letters.

Everyone was very curious to know the identity of this letter writer.

Only Nanke had no interest in this matter. She continued to obey Chen Changsheng's orders, standing in front of Daoist Baishi and staring into his eyes.

After finishing the letter, Chen Changsheng seemed to fall into a

contemplative mood. After a while, he offered the letter to Linghai Zhiwang.

Daoist Baishi sneered, "Feigning mystery... just what did that person write? Could they have predicted this matter beforehand?"

Linghai Zhiwang took his eyes off the letter and looked at Daoist Baishi's face with a somewhat strange expression.

Daoist Baishi suddenly felt a little cold.

Linghai Zhiwang said, "You guessed correctly. That person said that we must kill you, thus establishing our might."

Daoist Baishi's complexion changed at these words.

He did not know the identity of that letter writer, but he knew that many of the Orthodoxy's matters recently had emerged from that person's brush.

Crucially, based on his observations over this period, he was certain that Chen Changsheng deeply trusted that person, and would follow his every word.

It was then that a priest appeared on the outskirts of the forest.

The Archbishop of Wenshui went to inquire. He returned after a moment and whispered to Chen Changsheng, "The Tang Second Master has come to pay respects to Your Holiness."

Chapter 824 – Ruthless Red

Everyone outside the Daoist church was surprised to hear of the Tang Second Master's visit, but Daoist Baishi felt his spirit rise.

Chen Changsheng had entered Wenshui City yesterday, his presence being announced with music by Wenshui's Daoist church at dusk. However, the Tang clan had not reacted in the slightest.

Suddenly, at this very moment, the Tang clan had sent someone, and it was the Second Master who was rumored to already be in control of the Tang clan.

It was plain to see that the Tang clan had informers in the Daoist church and knew about the incident with Daoist Baishi.

Such an important figure as the Tang Second Master immediately coming to pay a visit was precisely to safeguard Daoist Baishi's life.

Everyone turned to Chen Changsheng, wanting to know his decision. Would he act according to the letter and execute Daoist Baishi in the name of the Pope so as to establish his might, or would he act according to the laws of the church and adjourn the matter for the time being, at the same time avoiding further agitating his conflict with the Imperial Court and the Tang clan?

Guan Feibai looked at Chen Changsheng, not knowing what Chen Changsheng would choose, nor knowing what he hoped Chen Changsheng would choose.

You're already the true Pope; will you still act like that young Daoist entering the capital for the first time?

Chen Changsheng suddenly raised his head up to the sky.

It was not far from dawn. The morning sun was still on that end of the Wenshui, not far above the surface of the water.

The red glow of the morning smeared the distant sky, even

seeming to set the clouds ablaze. It was no different from twilight.

He recalled how, under a very similar twilight, he and Tang Thirty-Six had conversed atop the great banyan tree within the Orthodox Academy.

He then recalled how, also in the Orthodox Academy, in the darkness after twilight's retreat, he and Tang Thirty-Six had engaged in another conversation atop the great banyan tree.

In brief, over those years, starting from that inn called Plum Garden, he and Tang Thirty-Six had had many conversations.

In those conversations, they had chatted about many things, not recollections of the past, but expectations for the future.

In the twilight, the lake of the Orthodox Academy was suffused with a golden light. That koi fish that had eaten too much was gradually sinking into the rotten mud.

They did not want to live like that.

At the time, Xuanyuan Po had been vigorously hitting trees on the other side of the lake.

Tang Thirty-Six said to Chen Changsheng that, regardless if it was autumn wind or spring, since they were still young, they should act according to their personality.

Xuanyuan Po had returned to White Emperor City and it had been a long time since he had heard any news of him. Tang Thirty-Six had means of continuing to curse at whoever he wished, or declare that if he wanted to curse eighteen generations of ancestors, he certainly wouldn't curse just seventeen generations, because the people memorialized in the ancestral hall that was his prison were all his own ancestors.

In that other conversation, the one in the night, Tang Thirty-Six had said to him that he would be Pope in the future.

He had said that it wasn't that great to be the Pope.

Tang Thirty-Six had said that of course it wasn't.

Tang Thirty-Six had also said to him that in the future, the Orthodox Academy would serve as the foundation for him to become Pope, which was why he had put so much energy into recruiting new students for the Orthodox Academy.

This fellow had long since imagined the matters of the present. This fellow had always helped him deal with many things.

Now that it was his turn to decide and deal, he realized that it really wasn't an easy job.

.....

.....

Chen Changsheng drew back his gaze, turned around, and walked back into the Daoist church.

He made his stance extremely clear.

Terribly shocked, Daoist Baishi used all his strength, lunging forward like a gale. He charged after that figure in the holy gate, wanting to die together with him.

Yet he was not even able to touch Chen Changsheng.

Nanke still stood in front of him, staring at him with that imbecilic expression on her face.

In his eyes, this girl was like a true devil.

With three heavy thumps, Linghai's iron ruler, An Lin's belt, and Zhexiu's demon sword almost simultaneously struck Daoist Baishi.

Daoist Baishi collapsed in front of the holy gate's threshold, all his bones broken, blood pouring into his lungs, his Ethereal Palace shattered. It was impossible for him to stand again.

His eyes filled with despair. The panic and reluctance that came on the verge of death transformed into a howl that sought to burst from his lips.

He wanted to inform the Tang Second Master outside the forest, quickly, come save me!

Regretfully, he was not able to make this howl.

The instant his lips opened, a cloth was shoved into his mouth with lightning speed.

At some point, the Archbishop of Wenshui had appeared at his side.

His left hand had stuffed a cloth into Daoist Baishi's mouth.

At the same time, his right hand gripped a dagger and shoved it into Daoist Baishi's chest.

It was very quiet, so the sound of the dagger being thrust into his body was extremely hair-raising.

A small part of the dagger stuck out of his body, tranquil as a mirror and exuding a faint aura of holiness.

The Archbishop of Wenshui's expression was also so tranquil, so holy.

Daoist Baishi's eyes went round while a muffled sound came from his throat. He extended a hand to snatch at the archbishop's clothes, but failed.

He continuously writhed and struggled like a fish that had been brought out of the Wenshui, unable to breathe and on the verge of death, and unable to escape.

The Archbishop of Wenshui looked to Chen Changsheng and softly said, "Your Holiness, please rest for a while. I am confident that the Tang Second Master has the patience to wait for a little while."

As he spoke, he had one hand clamped on the cloth in Daoist Baishi's mouth and one hand on the dagger thrust into Daoist Baishi's chest.

Daoist Baishi was still struggling and writhing in his hands.

The archbishop's voice did not tremble, but remained serene, even somewhat humble.

An Lin could no longer look, and turned around.

On the other hand, Linghai Zhiwang seemed somewhat appreciative, almost gasping in praise.

The holy gate slowly closed.

Just when it was about to close, Guan Feibai saw the Archbishop of Wenshui drag Daoist Baishi into the woods, in the meantime casually jabbing the dagger a few more times into Daoist Baishi's body.

Jabbing, not stabbing.

Stabbing was for fighting while jabbing was for slaughtering.

The corner of Guan Feibai's eyes twitched.

This time, it had nothing to do with the fact that he had witnessed a major incident of the Orthodoxy.

He knew that an archbishop that the Orthodoxy had dispatched to Wenshui City and was able to last for so long was certainly no ordinary person.

But he could never have imagined, and found it very difficult to accept, that such a calm, meek, and noble archbishop was, at certain special moments, so much like a madman.

If the Orthodoxy had many people, no, even just a few people like him, then it would be far too frightening.

.....

.....

Daoist Baishi was the Archbishop of the Hall of Literary Glory, a true Prefect of the Orthodoxy. Without question, he was also a very important person in Shang Xingzhou's plans.

Today, he had died, died in the Daoist church of Wenshui City.

Having received such an enormous provocation, the other side would assuredly respond, especially because this was Wenshui, the unfathomably deep Wenshui, the Tang clan's Wenshui.

Daoist Baishi's death had made the Orthodoxy and Chen Changsheng's stance unquestionably clear. They were already prepared for full hostilities to break out with the Tang clan.

Everyone knew that the Wenshui Tangs were the wealthiest clan in the continent, the leader of the Four Great Clans, but in truth, the hidden strength of the Tang clan far surpassed what anyone could imagine.

The Tang clan's history was simply too long.

Three years ago, in the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, the Tang clan had played an incredibly important role, but only a few people knew.

If not for the fact that the Tang clan had thought of a way to break the Imperial Design, the Tianhai Divine Empress might still have been seated high up on the imperial throne.

At present, the secret strength of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had been placed under the control of the Monastery of Eternal Spring in Luoyang. The vast majority of the remaining property and businesses had been given to the Tang clan, making their strength even more terrifying.

The backing of a faction like the Tang clan was naturally something that everyone wanted. The Orthodoxy and the Imperial Court were no exception.

Logically speaking, even though the Tang clan had clearly been much closer to the Imperial Court in these past few years, the Orthodoxy should not have displayed such a fierce stance.

It had to be said that the letter writer had a very deep understanding of Chen Changsheng.

He or she knew that Chen Changsheng had to bring Tang Thirty-

Six out of the ancestral hall.

If this matter did not change no matter how warmly the Orthodoxy treated the Tang clan, then hostilities would break out eventually.

Chapter 825 – A Prayer Mat

Since hostilities would break out sooner or later, why not open with the most unyielding position?

If this were a chessboard, the Mount Song Army headquarters was just a casual move meant to symbolize the Li Palace's renewed voice to the continent.

The second move in Wenshui City was a deciding move, a move that would determine life and death.

The letter writer wanted to use the matter of Tang Thirty-Six to have Chen Changsheng take the toughest posture possible.

This attitude was for the Tang clan to see, but not for the Tang Second Master to see.

Although the chief branch had already lost power, the Tang clan was still the Tang Old Master's Tang clan.

The letter writer was gambling on the decision the Tang Old Master would make towards the Orthodoxy's most unyielding stance.

The greatest problem at the moment was that the circumstances of the Tang clan over the past two years already proved that the Tang Old Master supported the second branch. To put it another way, he had already made a decision between Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng, and how could a figure like the Tang Old Master change his stance just because of the Orthodoxy's tough stance?

.....

.....

Before the Tang Old Master, the Orthodoxy first had to confront the Tang Second Master.

The middle-aged man rumored to already be in complete control

of the Tang clan was unquestionably one of the most powerful men on the continent.

But in front of the quiet Daoist church, he looked like an ordinary middle-aged man.

Perhaps it was because the Archbishop of Wenshui was not as meek as usual, much less flattering him.

The archbishop seemingly treated him as an ordinary middle-aged believer that had come to pay respects to the Pope.

In the early morning, three Prefects of the Orthodoxy and one hundred cavalry had entered Wenshui City.

Afterwards, a great deal of noise had come from the Daoist church.

It was at that moment that the Tang Second Master came to the stone steps and communicated that he wished to pay respects to the Pope.

The archbishops had delivered the message for him, and then he had said that the Pope had just woken up and was still washing up, necessitating a wait.

This was a very commonplace matter. Although the Tang Second Master knew that it was just an excuse, he still needed to wait at the bottom of the stone steps.

But he didn't expect that he would have to wait for half a day. The morning light had driven away the mist in the forest and then transformed into the rare warm sunlight of the winter sun.

As time passed, the two Guardians and several followers standing behind the Tang Second Master gained rather nasty complexions.

Since the Pope had come to Wenshui, the Tang clan naturally had to send someone to meet him, but why did the Second Master have to wait so long? Were they showing off their power to the Tang clan?

If not for the fact that the Tang Second Master had remained quiet this entire time, they probably would have already started to make a ruckus.

This was Wenshui City after all. From a certain perspective, the head of the Tang clan was the true emperor here.

Whether it was Emperor Taizong or the infamous Tianhai Divine Empress, in this city, their decrees were never as effective as a single sentence from the clan head.

In their view, the Second Master represented the Tang clan, so not even the Pope could humiliate him so!

The Tang Second Master, his hands held behind him, had waited beneath the stone steps for half a day. Let alone anger, not even impatience could be seen on his face.

But this did not mean that his mood was so serene.

In reality, his mood was quite terrible.

In the coup three years ago in the Mausoleum of Books, he had played an extremely important role. The common people did not know of it, but everyone who had the right to know knew of it.

From that moment, he became an important character of the continent with the ability to tip the scales.

Although he had not yet become the master of Wenshui City, everyone knew that the day was not far.

Moreover, the Old Master had given over both the family business and the internal affairs of the clan to him.

He was already the de facto master of Wenshui City.

And after Tang Thirty-Six was imprisoned in the ancestral hall half a year ago, no one dared to question him, not even Xuelao City.

Even when he went to visit the emperor in the capital a month ago, he could walk straight into the palace without needing to send

a message!

Just who would dare deliberately make him wait for so long?

Failing to kill you in the mountains was truly unfortunate, and I even let you enter Wenshui. Baishi, that dunce, just how was he discovered? But even though you've entered Wenshui, what can you do except rage around like a child? The great Pope... do you really think it's that great?

With a calm expression, the Tang Second Master thought these treasonous words as he gazed at the roof of the church nestled in the forest.

When he thought of those final words, he found them rather amusing. As he praised his wit, the corners of his lips perked upward.

In the past, the Archbishop of Wenshui at his side would assuredly ask very tactfully and ingratiatingly about what the Second Master was smiling about.

But it was different today. The Archbishop of Wenshui gave him a serious look and said, "Mister Tang, please do not forget your manners."

The Tang Second Master's smile suddenly vanished. He could no longer maintain his tranquil visage, transforming it into a frigid expression.

Just when all patience was about to vanish, the Daoist church finally issued a message.

The Tang Second Master and his party ascended the stone steps, crossing through the quiet forest and arriving outside the holy gate. Raising their gazes, they saw the pear tree.

There was no one beneath the pear tree. There was no snow or snow-like white flowers on the ground. Someone had recently washed the flagstones, leaving them wet and clean. Perhaps there was blood there before?

The sky was still full of clouds and the winter sun was still giving off its warm light. There was still quite some time before nightfall, but many lanterns had already been lit in the hall.

If one stood outside the holy gate and looked in, one would occasionally get the misperception that a sea of stars lay within.

The Tang Second Master walked into the holy gate.

The two Guardians and the Tang clan guards prepared to follow, but they were stopped.

The Archbishop of Wenshui looked at these people from the Tang clan and calmly said, "Please do not run around the forest, or else you might die."

As he was speaking to them, several dozen priests appeared in the back garden by the river, and two thick and heavy chains floated up to the surface, blocking off the river.

Due to the rules of the Tang clan, there were essentially no boats on the Wenshui, but the Daoist church had still prepared themselves for the possibility.

The Tang Second Master gazed at the sea of stars formed by the lanterns in silence, then raised his hand to indicate that his followers should wait.

After crossing that high threshold, he arrived in the quiet area in front of the hall and saw Linghai Zhiwang and An Lin.

The two archbishops stood on the stone steps in front of the hall, appearing like two sacred idols.

The Tang Second Master greeted them, and then slowly opened his mouth.

He was laughing, but there was no sound.

This was his habitual expression. At times, people would find it comical, at times abnormally terrifying, but no matter when, it would always be brimming with ridicule and malice towards this

world.

Linghai Zhiwang expressionlessly looked at him like he was looking upon an idiot.

An Lin slightly nodded her head to return the greeting and then ignored him.

The Tang Second Master gradually ceased his laugh and said, "Using two archbishops to watch the door—has any other Pope done this before?"

He didn't wait for an answer. With a light brush of his sleeves, he pushed upon the door and entered.

Countless lanterns were lit within the hall, their bright rays of light shining upon his face.

He was rather similar to Tang Thirty-Six. They both had handsome faces, but his was even more indifferent.

In the next moment, that smear of indifference was finally dispelled, transforming into an indescribable emotion.

A prayer mat had been placed in the center of the church.

It was naturally there for people to kneel on.

Chapter 826 – What I Miss

The prayer mat was not new or old, not thick or thin. It was in the style that could normally be found in churches or ancestral halls.

The Tang Second Master silently regarded this prayer mat.

When prostrating, a prayer mat between one's knees and the hard floor would make the process more comfortable.

But who did he need to kneel to?

Of course it was the Pope.

Countless lanterns hung like stars in the night sky, a young man standing amongst them.

The Tang Second Master did not speak, nor did he hear anyone else speaking.

The silence in the hall continued.

The Tang Second Master's eyes slowly narrowed.

He finally moved. He walked up to the prayer mat, used his hands to bring up his front lapel, and slowly prostrated.

His movements were very slow and meticulous. From raising his front lapel to bending his knees to leaning his body forward, a very long time was required.

This period of time was enough for him to think about many things.

I hear that many years ago, the previous Pope also came to Wenshui, but when did Father ever have to make such a large bow?

You're of the same generation as Tang Tang, so I'm your elder, so how can you accept such a bow from me?

Even if you don't call me 'Second Uncle', you should at least say

that this bow is not needed.

This was truly a long span of time, and to the Tang Second Master, it could almost be described as endless.

Since it was long enough for him to think of so much, it was naturally enough time for that young man in the shadows to speak.

But why haven't I heard anything from you?

He even thought, did I perhaps miss a word?

Perhaps his voice is too soft or he spoke too vaguely?

No, the church was so quiet that the softest voice could be heard.

For instance, right now, his knees finally met the prayer mat, the soft fabric lightly crinkling.

But to his ears, it was a heart-shaking thunderclap.

.....

.....

In this manner, the Tang Second Master prostrated before Chen Changsheng.

Right up until it really occurred, he still did not dare to believe.

He did not dare believe that Chen Changsheng truly would not say to him that this bow was not needed.

He did not dare believe that Chen Changsheng would so calmly accept his bow.

The noise of his knees meeting the prayer mat faded away. All sound within the hall vanished, leaving a silence disturbed only by the lanterns swaying in the wind.

The Tang Second Master kneeled on the prayer mat, his heart growing colder and colder, his expression becoming more and more indifferent.

And then, he stood up.

He had kneeled like a mountain slowly collapsing, but he had risen like the morning sun emerging from the water: straightforward and without the smallest hesitation.

He had stood up on his own.

It was evident that this was disrespect before a Saint, but he was currently very angry, so he was determined to brush it off.

He looked at Chen Changsheng and indifferently said, "I have seen His Holiness the Pope."

He had only seen the Pope, but was not paying respects.

The Daoist church remained quiet. The countless lanterns swayed in the wind, rustling like a sea of pines in the mountains.

Chen Changsheng quietly looked at the Tang Second Master, looked for a very long time.

This was his first time seeing the Tang Second Master.

Whether during the coup of the Mausoleum of Books or killing Zhou Tong on the snowy street, he and the rumored Tang Second Master had never once met.

The Tang Second Master was very similar to Tang Thirty-Six. Both had handsome faces, cold personalities, and noble auras, but the Tang Second Master's face was tinged with gloom.

"When seeing you, I very naturally think of him. It's been a very long time since I last saw him," Chen Changsheng noted. "The longer it is, the more I miss the time he was at my side. He did a lot of things for me back then."

The Tang Second Master asked, "Such as?"

Chen Changsheng took a step forward, walking out of the fluctuating light to the Tang Second Master.

"Such as... right now, he would say to you, 'Did I let you rise? Then why did you rise?'"

.....

.....

As one of that extremely small number of people that were able to become Pope without having stepped into the Divine Domain, Chen Changsheng had a limit to his strength, no matter how talented he was.

The Tang Second Master was well aware of this point, yet when he saw that young man walk out of the shadows and the sea of stars, saw his serene face and heard those words, he felt an indescribable pressure. It was like a mountain range or the vast sea of stars descending into the Wenshui, stirring countless waves in his mind!

It was only at this point that he was finally made aware of the fact that no matter his strength, Chen Changsheng was the Pope, and so the Tang Second Master was standing in front of a Pope.

This awareness made him extremely uncomfortable, in the same way as Chen Changsheng using Tang Thirty-Six's tone of voice to say those words to him.

'Did I let you rise?'

If Tang Thirty-Six were present today, he really would say something like this, not giving the slightest face. He might have even been harsher.

The Tang Second Master narrowed his eyes once more.

He naturally wouldn't kneel again. He gave a slightly scornful smile, saying nothing.

There is no 'if'. Tang Thirty-Six is imprisoned inside the ancestral hall; he cannot appear at your side.

"I had someone prepare this prayer mat."

Chen Changsheng glanced at the prayer mat, then raised his head to look back at the Tang Second Master. He continued, "Because I

hope that you also prepared for him a soft prayer mat. After being kept in the old estate for two and half years and imprisoned in the ancestral hall for half a year, given his personality, he must have been forced to kneel as punishment for a very long time. Without a prayer mat, such a thing will be more difficult to bear."

The Tang Second Master expressionlessly replied, "He is a descendant of my Tang clan. There are naturally elders in the clan that will tend to him. Your Holiness need not worry."

Chen Changsheng answered, "He is my friend. It is impossible for me to not worry."

Hearing this, the Tang Second Master raised his brows. "Your Holiness is only worried about these small matters?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "To me, this is a rather large concern."

The Tang Second Master harshly reproved, "Could it be more important than the future of the Li Palace?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "I think that perhaps the Tang Old Master and you have misunderstood. My coming to Wenshui City has nothing to do with the Li Palace. I have only come for him."

The Tang Second Master asked with faint ridicule, "Is that so? Could it be that Your Holiness only wants to take him away and has no other request to make to my Tang clan?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Precisely."

"Does Your Holiness think this matter very laughable? Or else why would you make such a joke?"

The Tang Second Master found the idea absurd. Do you think that if you just say this, you can convince the world that the Orthodoxy has no intentions against the Tang clan?

The more he thought, the more he found Chen Changsheng's words to be ridiculous, causing him to laugh.

When describing laughter, one would add a 'haha' or say that

they roared with laughter, because laughter was naturally accompanied by noise.

But everyone knew that the Tang Second Master's laughter had no sound, whether it was just a small laugh or a big laugh.

He only opened his mouth, looking like one of Xuelao City's mimes performing some fantastical story, silently and wholeheartedly sneering at others and this world.

This was the first time Chen Changsheng saw the famed noiseless laughing face of the Tang Second Master.

He didn't find it comical, nor did he find it frightening. It was just ugly, and also seemed very painful, like a fat goose that was waiting to be fed but ended up strangled to death by an iron string around its neck.

"I miss that friend of mine even more. If he were here, he might say... 'Are you mute? Or why else would it be so painful for you to laugh?'"

Chen Changsheng said this with not the slightest hint of scorn, only a faint yearning.

Chapter 827 – Without My Permission, the Sun Cannot Set Behind the Mountains

The Tang Second Master's laughing face was gradually restrained. Looking at Chen Changsheng, he asked, "Does Your Holiness the Pope truly intend to humiliate our Tang clan?"

Chen Changsheng's gaze was fixed on some place outside the hall as he replied, "I've never thought about humiliating anybody, but that fellow would often misinterpret my intentions to satisfy his own malicious interests. For example, right now, he would definitely say, 'I'm humiliating you, which has nothing to do with the Tang clan, because since when did you get the right to represent the Tang clan?'"

This was a most important question.

Although Chen Changsheng was borrowing Tang Thirty-Six's name to say it, it was clearly a question he wanted to ask.

The Orthodoxy did not agree to the second branch's inheriting the Tang clan and was not even willing to negotiate with it. It still firmly supported the chief branch.

This was a matter that had been determined a long time ago. However, before today, the Tang Second Master couldn't help but imagine another possibility. With the Imperial Court clearly at the height of its power and the Tang clan's chief branch at its nadir, perhaps the Li Palace might have given up on its original thoughts and was now attempting to draw closer to him, the true person in charge of the Tang clan?

If such a thing really did happen, the Tang clan would become even more important, would be able to act more freely, and would gain even more profit.

Chen Changsheng's words now directly announced that such a possibility did not exist.

The Tang Second Master was not too disappointed, but he once more felt that pressure.

This statement meant that if he wanted to become the true head of the Tang clan, he first needed to pass the bottleneck that was Chen Changsheng.

Although he was very confident and had the full support of the Imperial Court and Shang Xingzhou, his opponent this time was the entire Orthodoxy.

"I have no desire to humiliate the Tang clan, and in truth, I also have no desire to humiliate you. I just really don't like that laughing face of yours."

Chen Changsheng's voice was still extremely calm, just like the expression on his face.

It was somewhat impolite to say this in front of him, but at least it was honest.

"Wang Po also doesn't like this laughing face of mine... When he first saw me laugh like this in the old estate, he wanted nothing more than to punch me in the face."

The Tang Second Master continued, "But even if he's now an expert of the Divine Domain, I can still laugh like this and he still has no means of seizing me. Your Holiness, if you really don't like my way of laughing, then close your eyes or try to get used to it."

Compared to Chen Changsheng's words, his stance was even more impolite and unyielding.

This meaning of these words was clear and simple.

'The Li Palace should not involve itself in the Tang clan's affairs, and does not have the ability to, so please pretend you don't know, or... endure.'

.....

.....

The Daoist church of Wenshui, whether speaking of its main hall or its rear hall, was exceptionally grandiose, on par with the palace halls of the Li Palace.

This was because the Tang clan of Wenshui City had tributed far too much treasure to the Orthodoxy over the countless years.

Perhaps for this reason, the Guardians and attendants from the Tang clan did not look at the church with any sort of reverence. On the contrary, they proudly regarded it as a property of their clan.

Quite some time had passed since the Tang Second Master entered the rear hall, yet no sound had emerged from it. The expressions of the two Guardians gradually turned grim while those attendants wanted nothing more than to charge in.

If not for the fact that two archbishops stood guard outside, if the Pope were not within, if things were still as usual, the people of the Tang clan really might have done this.

The two Guardians glanced at each other, seeing the vigilance and unease in each other's eyes. Using some almost undetectable means, a message was sent out of the forest.

No howls of wind erupted from the forest, but there were a few extremely faint ripples of Qi that not even the church's array was able to sense.

The Archbishop of Wenshui, several dozen priests, and even more cavalry stood guard at this place.

On a certain tree in the forest, Zhexiu hugged the Demon Commander's Banner Sword, his eyes closed. He seemed to be resting, but his spiritual sense had been following those ripples of Qi this entire time.

If the Tang clan truly dared to commit this monstrous crime, the two Guardians and the people they had brought would find it impossible to break into the rear hall, as Linghai Zhiwang and An Lin were there, and the people hiding in the forest would probably

be killed very quickly.

The Tang clan naturally would not do something so foolish. Their true preparations were probably coming from another direction.

The back garden of the church bordered the Wenshui. On the opposite shore was a long dike, and behind the dike were restaurants and houses.

Two of these houses, separated by around two hundred zhang, had their doors tightly shut and were dimly lit. There were many people hidden inside, as well as several heavy metal boxes. These metal boxes contained mountain-breaking hatchets, a weapon designed by the Tang clan that was often used to hack off the sharp and hard foreclaws of the demons' wolf mounts on the battlefield. Today, however, their intended use was to sever the thick chains floating on the Wenshui.

When those chains were severed, the surface of the Wenshui which had been calm for so many years would welcome ten-some armored ships, each of them fitted with divine crossbows.

The drainpipe leading to the Daoist church was already full of some black, viscous, and oily substance, though its use was not yet clear.

The sun shone on the restaurant. From the second floor, one could get an even better view, could see even farther.

Luo Bu sat by the balcony, facing the setting sun as he drank while mentally counting how long it had been since the Tang Second Master had entered the hall.

The Orthodoxy had many experts, so logically speaking, even though the Tang clan had prepared for a long time, they should still have been able to cope with it.

The problem was that this was not all of the Tang clan's strength.

Luo Bu looked to the floor below.

The sunset hung over the Wenshui, the evening clouds gathered in the curtain of the night, and the trees lining the banks seemed to become red maples.

A blind zither player strummed his zither by the river.

Seven peddlers, six government laborers, three fortune-tellers, two elders selling sesame candy, and one girl buying cosmetic powder were on the street.

It was the same as yesterday.

Luo Bu silently regarded all this and thought to himself, the Tang clan's strength is truly unfathomable.

Would this fellow really get into trouble today?

.....

.....

"This being the case, why have you come to see me?" Chen Changsheng asked as he looked at the Tang Second Master.

The Tang Second Master answered, "This is Wenshui City, so as master, I naturally have to come and greet you and see if there's anything you find dissatisfactory. This is courtesy."

Chen Changsheng was quiet for a few moments, then said, "I know."

With the message delivered, he intended to send off his guest.

The Tang Second Master naturally would not leave like this. He still had not met that person he wanted to meet.

"Your Holiness has a friend in Wenshui. Coincidentally, I also have a friend in the Li Palace called Baishi."

He said to Chen Changsheng, "I don't know where he is right now. It's hard for old friends to meet, and I want to invite him to drink a few cups of wine with me."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Regrettably, he will no longer be able

to drink this cup of wine, as he is already dead."

He was very calm, as if he was speaking about a most ordinary affair.

But the Tang Second Master could no longer maintain his composure. His complexion slowly changed, and then he began to noiselessly laugh.

This time, there were a few more ambiguous emotions in his laughing face, and it was much colder.

"Then has Your Holiness ever thought that perhaps your friend is also already dead?"

He stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes.

Chen Changsheng was still very calm. "No, because I am still alive."

This was confidence.

He was the Pope.

As long as he lived, who would dare kill that friend of his?

The Tang Second Master stared into his eyes, stared for a very long time. Suddenly, he said, "Perhaps Your Holiness does not know, but my elder brother is suffering from a terrible illness. He has been confined to his bed for more than two years, and all medicine has been ineffective. He might die at any time. And this illness... is highly likely to be hereditary."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Then why haven't you gotten it? So in my view, this illness is not hereditary and that friend of mine will not get sick."

The Tang Second Master's voice became even colder. "Just who can say anything about a thing like illness?"

Chen Changsheng stared back, enunciating each word. "I can speak about it. If I do not permit him to get sick, he will not get sick."

Chapter 828 – The Water Grass at the Bottom of the Wenshui

The wind suddenly stopped, and the clouds obscured the setting sun. Night seemed to fall early, the golden threads on the water's surface gradually dimming.

In a very short amount of time, the two banks of the Wenshui grew colder, and a sinister aura penetrated both the chains and the tightly-shut doors of the houses.

Luo Bu sat on the second floor of the restaurant. As he listened to the tune of the blind zither player, he slowly shut his eyes. His right hand fell on the hilt of his sword and softly caressed it.

Even he did not have any confidence to contend against the unfathomable strength of the Tang clan. In the past, the most he could do was send a warning, but now he wanted to try.

Because in the past, the sword he used was a bronze sword that he had had forged at the smith in the village at the foot of the mountain for two taels of silver, but now he was using a different sword.

With this sword in hand, he could step amidst the frosted grass like a sword, transform his body into a sword. Even when facing an expert of the Divine Domain, he could still ensure that his Dao heart was brightly lit.

He closed his eyes, listening to the strumming of the zither from below, listening to the water beat against the shore, listening to the chains touch and then part from the surface of the water, sensing everything in the world.

Suddenly, his ears twitched.

He opened his eyes and looked into the river. His gaze deepened, looking into even deeper places, ultimately peering into the water grass.

He felt that something was strange about the water grass there. It was of a somewhat darker hue than the surrounding grass, but there was otherwise nothing special about it.

At this moment, the blind zither player by the river also seemed to hear something. Turning his head towards the Wenshui, he apparently forgot to move his hands.

The sound of the zither came to an abrupt stop.

The strange mood on the two banks of the river also went through an abrupt change.

The armored ships upstream silently retreated.

The two houses became completely empty.

The ripples of Qi in the forest vanished.

The Tang clan Guardians and attendants in front of the hall became much more quiet.

Only the seven peddlers, six government laborers, three fortune-tellers, two candy-selling elders, and the cosmetic-buying girl were still on the street as if they would never depart.

The door to the hall was pushed upon and the Tang Second Master walked out, his complexion unsightly.

He didn't even glance at Linghai Zhiwang and An Lin.

Daoist Baishi's death meant that the Orthodoxy's stance was abnormally firm and could not be changed.

As he walked down the stone path, he saw Zhexiu standing under a large tree.

The Tang Second Master knew what he wanted to say and indifferently said, "It was not easy for you to live until today. Do not speak casually."

Zhexiu impassively replied, "It was even more difficult for a weakling like you to live until today."

The Tang Second Master slowly raised his brow, his expression unchanging. Mentally, however, he was already angry beyond belief.

That year on the snowy street of the capital, Wang Po had once said to him that when he gave up on cultivation and began to learn to scheme, the moment he began to pursue power, he became a weakling.

Today, he once more was evaluated as such, and the one evaluating him was a junior.

The more furious he was, the more indifferent he appeared. He looked at Zhexiu and asked, "Do you have a death wish?"

Zhexiu did not answer his question, saying, "Don't make any secret moves against that fellow."

The Tang Second Master stared into his eyes and said, "In truth, I've never understood how a wolf cub like you could become that prodigal son's friend."

"We aren't friends."

Zhexiu paused, then continued, "He's my employer, so don't touch him."

.....

.....

The Tang clan's people had all retreated. The darkness lay thick and both banks of the Wenshui were extremely quiet.

Chen Changsheng walked to the shore, Linghai Zhiwang and the others standing to his right and left. Nanke had followed his orders and remained in the church.

The starlight shone over the water, infusing it with countless silver scales. Even the best eyes would find it difficult to distinguish what was going on at the bottom of the river, let alone the water grass at its very depths.

The master of the Tang clan's chief branch, Tang Thirty-Six's father, had never been in good health, and in the last few years, his condition had worsened. Many people in the continent knew of this matter, including Chen Changsheng. No one had ever had any misgivings on this matter, and not even Tang Thirty-Six had ever mentioned it in his letter.

But after hearing those words from the Tang Second Master today, he felt that something wasn't right.

"Although no one has yet managed to make clear what sort of illness this is, it has been confirmed that it's not poison."

Archbishop An Lin continued, "Both the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green and South Stream Temple sent people to treat him."

The Archbishop of Wenshui glanced at Chen Changsheng and whispered, "Reporting to Your Holiness: before the temple closing of South Stream Temple... that person came."

The temple closing was seclusion, and in the past few years, only one seclusion needed to be specially mentioned, so the person that he was referring to was naturally obvious.

An Lin appeared flabbergasted while Linghai Zhiwang slightly arched his brows—the Li Palace had no knowledge of this matter.

Chen Changsheng was even more surprised, thinking to himself, why didn't she tell me?

The Archbishop of Wenshui whispered, "That person did not let us speak of it."

If the master of the Tang clan's chief branch was not ill, but rather had been poisoned, then the true blood of the Heavenly Phoenix should have been able to cure it.

Xu Yourong had presumably thought the same.

That the master of the chief branch was still confined to his bed and did not seem to be improving meant that he was not poisoned,

but ill.

The change in the Tang Old Master's stance most likely had a fairly straightforward connection to this matter.

Chen Changsheng knew why Xu Yourong had come. She knew that Tang Thirty-Six was his best friend, and he was very grateful to her for this act.

After thinking for a while, he still decided to visit the chief branch tomorrow.

It wasn't that he didn't trust the abilities of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green or Xu Yourong, only that he wanted to see if he could rely on his own medical skills to change the tragic conclusion of this elder. Moreover, he had this feeling that matters were not as simple as they seemed. The Tang Second Master's words and his encounter with the little monster in Hanqiu City's Willow Lodge contributed to his misgivings.

"Investigate a disciple of the Longevity Sect called Chusu. This person practices a very strange cultivation method. No matter how rigorously they were concealed, someone should have heard of them."

He first ordered Linghai Zhiwang, then said to An Lin, "Write an urgent letter to South Stream Temple asking if they had any results from the matter I asked them to investigate."

An Lin did not know what he had written to South Stream Temple about, and so asked in confusion, "What matter could be so urgent?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "I want to know just where the legacy of the Yellow Springs Flow ended up, whether or not it remains in the south."

Linghai Zhiwang connected this matter to the strange cultivation method practiced by the Longevity Sect disciple called Chusu, and his expression instantly changed.

An Lin also turned rather pale, muttering to herself, "Could the Longevity Sect dare do such an insane thing?"

"I have no proof." Chen Changsheng paused, then turned to the Archbishop of Wenshui. "Have someone investigate whether the Tang clan has any connection to this matter."

The three departed to carry out their orders.

Carrying his sword, Guan Feibai walked out of the Daoist church.

He didn't come to chat with Chen Changsheng, only felt that Chen Changsheng should not remain unguarded at this moment.

Chen Changsheng contemplatively gazed at the starlight-strewn river.

He truly didn't have evidence. His only clue was the words the Demon Lord had said in the mountains.

The Demon Lord had clearly stated that the young array master was a little monster of the Longevity Sect called Chusu that was acting on the orders of Shang Xingzhou and the Tang clan.

On that early morning in Hanqiu City when he and Nanke had encountered the monster from the Yellow Springs in the kitchen, body covered in poison and evil to the extreme, he had not thought of this conversation. Only afterward did he remember the Demon Lord's words and associate the two matters together. The problem was that the Demon Lord's words could not serve as evidence. Everyone knew that he might just be attempting to sow discord.

As Chen Changsheng ruminated over these problems, he had no idea that in the depths of the silvery water, a clump of water grass was lightly swaying. The color of this water grass was different from its surrounding companions. Suddenly, it parted from the river bottom and slowly approached the rocks of the shore. It looked just like a ball of mud in the river, and made no sound.

Chapter 829 – Assassination on the Shore of the Wenshui

There were many crevices on the rocks lining the shore, and one of these crevices was connected to the drainpipe running beneath the Daoist church.

During the daytime, the Tang clan had sent someone to break the array in that area and fill the inside with a black and viscous substance.

The clump of water mud slowly flowed into the crevice, seeping into the drainpipe below the Daoist church. It continued to nudge forward, making no sound, and this object seemed to be covered in some mysterious substance that prevented it from being stained by the sticky black oil.

Chen Changsheng's gaze fell on the opposite shore.

He did not know that in the daytime, the opposite shore was buzzing with activity, with many government laborers, peddlers, and fortune-tellers, and even a blind zither player at the shore. The restaurant had also been rather bustling, and Luo Bu had drunk two jars of fine wine there.

He did not notice that the ground behind was slightly swelling and that two frost-colored blades of grass had already crawled over his feet.

The black mud noiselessly burst apart like a budding flower, an ugly hand covered with scales and fur stretching out of the ground.

There was a tiny perturbation in the Qi of the world. With Chen Changsheng's sharp senses, he immediately noticed.

But his reaction was still a step too slow.

He was too late to use his swiftest Yeshe Step or Hanging Sunset to send himself far away.

The ugly and terrifying hand had shot out of the ground and was now wrapped in a death grip around his ankle.

An indescribable Qi emerged from this hand and traveled up his ankles, invading the rest of his body.

Chen Changsheng felt like he had fallen into the mouth of a volcano. His entire being seemed to be wrapped in scorching lava, every part of his skin in excruciating, almost numbing pain.

This was an illusion, because this Qi was not hot, but frigidly cold.

This incredibly cold and foul Qi poured into his meridians and began to corrode his flesh and blood.

Even more terrifying was that this cold and foul Qi seemed to have a life of its own. Transforming into a thin membrane, it completely sealed off all three hundred sixty-five Qi openings. This also meant that the star radiance in those Qi openings would not be able to break out for a short period of time.

Immediately after, this Qi poured into his chest and froze his Ethereal Palace into an icy mountain.

All this happened in an extremely brief span of time.

The yellow leaf on the tree had only fallen an inch from its branch while the stars had not even had the time to twinkle.

Chen Changsheng's body had been seized, both his breathing and heartbeat frozen.

Let alone a counterattack, he couldn't even make a noise.

The subterranean sneak attack had been too insidious, the Qi too cold and sinister.

Any other cultivator, even a grand expert at the peak of Star Condensation, if caught completely unprepared and suddenly assaulted by this sinister attack which had not been seen in the world for so many years, would be seized and then silently die.

Would Chen Changsheng die like this? Protected by countless experts, in a church of the Orthodoxy, under the silvery starlight?

Guan Feibai had walked out of the church with his sword, but he was still ten-some zhang from Chen Changsheng.

Crucially, other than sensing that the wind had gotten somewhat chillier, he did not feel that anything was wrong.

The Daoist church's array had also not sensed the arrival of that insidious assassin.

Chen Changsheng's breathing slowed. Counting from the start of the sneak attack, his second breath had been seven times longer than his first.

At the same time, his heartbeat had also slowed. Also counting from the start of the sneak attack, his second heartbeat had come many times slower than his first heartbeat.

If this continued, his next breath might never come, his heartbeat might stop, and then he would die.

Chen Changsheng was extremely close to death at this moment, but this was not even the closest he had been to death.

Starting from the age of ten, he had kept the shadow of death as his constant companion. Beneath New North Bridge, by the lake in Mount Han, or at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, he had encountered much more dangerous situations, so when he could so clearly see the menace of death, he did not panic.

More importantly, he was very experienced in how to deal with such cold Qi.

He had been blown about by Zhizhi's dragon breath many times. In these past few years, he would occasionally transform into a sculpture of ice at the bottom of a cave or a block of ice floating in the lake of some deserted palace.

The breath of the Black Frost Dragon was the coldest substance

in the world. Although this assassin's Qi was even more sinister, it was still not as cold.

From a certain perspective, Chen Changsheng was the person in the world who had resisted cold Qi the most. In terms of both mind and body, his endurance far surpassed a normal person, and even an expert of the Divine Domain might not be his match in this aspect.

In the view of the assassin, Chen Changsheng's body and spiritual sense should have been completely frozen, and even his mind should have ground to a halt, making the idea of a counterattack ridiculous.

Chen Changsheng truly could not move, but he could still think.

As long as he could think, no one could hold him.

In the midst of this interminable gap between breaths and heartbeats, his mind moved.

Countless swords poured out of his sheath, one after the other!

Countless streams of swift and forceful sword intent enveloped the entire back garden.

Countless sword glows hacked at his surroundings, shattering the starlight and shredding the grass. Deep sword slashes appeared all over the ground while hard flecks of mud were sent flying every which way.

The Daoist church's array was finally activated. A clear light erupted from its roof, shrouding the entirety of the church and its garden.

Within these innumerable sword glows, a faint groan could be heard. It was accompanied by a ripping sound, like something had been broken.

The lawn incessantly bulged as if something underground was currently attempting to escape.

The sinister and foul Qi no longer had a source, so Chen Changsheng's life was no longer on the verge of being extinguished, but he still could not move for the moment, still was in danger.

The swords flew back, hovering around his body and forming an impenetrable sword array, releasing a buzzing sound.

.....

.....

Looking at Chen Changsheng from the distance, Guan Feibai had already noticed that something was strange.

The slowing of Chen Changsheng's breathing and heartbeat could not be concealed from his brightly lit Dao heart.

Then, he saw the mud on the grass and that bizarre hand gripping Chen Changsheng's ankle.

He unsheathed his longsword and charged over. He was extremely nervous, because he realized that he might be too late.

At this moment, countless sword glows appeared over the grass, cleaving the starlight and grass into pieces and forcing out the assassin.

Seeing the bulges on the grass, Guan Feibai threw out his longsword in their direction.

The darkness by the Wenshui was suddenly illuminated by the white flash of a sword.

The starlight from the innumerable stars seemed to dim, the frosty grass bent, and the yellow leaves crumbled.

Chapter 830 – The Sword's Tip Must Be Revealed

Guan Feibai's attack seemed very simple, but it was actually one of the mightiest sword techniques of the Mount Li Sword Style.

During the battle in Luoyang, when the then-Sect Master of the Mount Li Sword Sect, Su Li's master, saw Emperor Taizong's Frost God Spear, he comprehended this sword technique.

This sword technique was a sword of the battlefield, but when it struck, it was a spear breaking through the skies, able to contend against thousands. It was called the Sword's Tip.

It meant not that the sword's tip should be fully revealed, but that the sword's tip must be revealed, that the sword's tip needed to be seen by the entire world.

Winds howled, countless waves raged on the river, and shreds of grass flew about the air—a world-shaking momentum.

Two years ago, Guan Feibai had succeeded in breaking into Star Condensation on the battlefields of the snowy plains, and he was currently at the middle level of Star Condensation. Although everyone knew that he was a genius of the sword, he was still quite young. His current level was truthfully still not enough to use this mighty secret technique of his sect. But he had used this technique without hesitation, utterly disregarding the highly probable backlash of sword intent.

Because he was very angry, and also somewhat afraid.

If Chen Changsheng had not had those ten thousand swords to guard him, wouldn't he have died before his eyes?

.....

.....

The cold winter night was cleaved apart by the supreme might

revealed by the Sword's Tip, drawing a white beam of light through the sky.

A heavy and violent thump resonated through the grass, causing mud to be tossed into the air and jolting out a small gray figure.

This person was a hunchback, short, and dressed in black. It was precisely the monster that Chen Changsheng had met in Hanqiu City.

A clear and deep sword wound appeared on the monster's chest. Two of the fingers on his left hand had also been severed, a wound most likely inflicted by Chen Changsheng's swords.

But whether it was from the wound on his chest or the stumps of his fingers, what flowed was not blood, but some sort of gray liquid.

The monster fixed his eyes on Guan Feibai and let out a shrill howl.

This howl was filled with pain and a crazed impulse to kill.

The moment the Sword's Tip stabbed into the monster, Guan Feibai felt an ominous feeling in his sword heart, as well as clear feedback from his sword.

The monster's skin and body were incredibly tough, like some sort of flexible armor but also like a muddy paste. It was very slippery and hard to apply force on.

He had not hesitated to use his strongest attack despite the backlash of sword intent, but he was only able to leave a wound on the monster's body, not heavily injure it!

Seeing the monster charge over, Guan Feibai tensed, but he remained fearless, his fighting intent once more rising.

The longsword in his hand had just been rendered into powder by that fierce attack. His hands were empty, but this did not mean that he had lost the ability to fight.

As one of the magnificent Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws, how could he lose to an ugly monster that looked just like some giant mouse?

An extremely sharp yet shapeless Qi coalesced on his forearm, the wind shredding into pieces upon touching it.

He truly deserved his reputation as a sword genius of the Mount Li Sword Sect—he had actually refined a [Righteous Sword](#)!

.....

.....

This monster was used to living life in the shadows. Normally, upon seeing the assassination on Chen Changsheng fail, the Daoist church's array activate, and the Orthodoxy's experts soon rush over, he would definitely have immediately turned and left. He would not have lingered for another second, as he did not want to take this sort of risk.

But tonight, this was not possible. He found it somewhat impossible to control his emotions.

The moment he was injured by the Sword's Tip, he began to grow angry, and when he discovered that he had been injured by the Mount Li Sword Style, that his opponent was a young disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect, his rage began to blaze even more fiercely. His eyes turned a deep red and the seal branded on the deepest part of his soul began to burn, burning at his mind until only one thought remained.

Su Li must die! Anyone who is related to [Su Li](#) must die! Everyone in the Mount Li Sword Sect must be slaughtered to a man!

The monster flew through the sky, wind howling around him, his putrid and foul aura exuding a terrifying pressure!

Whether in Hanqiu City or in the attack just now, the monster would always act from the shadows and then attempt to escape. He had never once revealed his entire strength. Only now, when he

had decided to kill Guan Feibai, did he display his true level of cultivation, his strength reaching an incredible level!

Blood trickled from the corner of Guan Feibai's lips, the result of backlashing sword intent and then forcefully activating the Righteous Sword after being injured.

Seeing that horrifying and sinister figure, he very quickly determined that he was no match, but so what?

He was currently standing in front of Chen Changsheng.

As long as he stood there, the monster could not wound Chen Changsheng.

As for himself, he believed that if the monster wanted to defeat him, a suitable price would have to be paid.

Yes, as the most valiant and irritable of the Mount Li Sword Sect's disciples, he had chosen the strongest attack for his first move, and now he was choosing the most ruthless move.

The final move of the Mount Li Sword Style!

He was prepared to exchange life for life, wound for wound.

He firmly believed that no matter how severe the wounds he suffered would be, the monster would not be able to leave unscathed, so it might as well forget about leaving.

Chen Changsheng had just shaken off the ice over his body and heart, and upon seeing this sight, shouted, "No!"

He certainly did not have a complete understanding of this monster's power and means, but he was keenly aware that the monster's entire body was covered in a vicious toxin.

If Guan Feibai wanted to exchange wound for wound, his end might not be as he imagined, and he even might die.

Chen Changsheng had awakened a moment too late. He could only shout, nothing more.

Guan Feibai's right hand slashed down like a sword, the Righteous Sword noiselessly slicing through the wind. Not even glancing at it, the monster shot out a tentacle-like finger.

It appeared that both sides were about to inflict grievous injuries upon each other, or perhaps an even worse result. Who could change all this?

A petite figure flew out of the church's window.

At this moment, the small figure was still several dozen zhang away from the battlefield. It was logically impossible for her to make it.

But this figure's speed already surpassed the bounds of logic, seeming just like a real bolt of lightning.

This thunderbolt bizarrely avoided the bits of grass and mud, precisely striking the monster.

To describe it more accurately, that petite figure flew through the air and rammed into the monster.

A groan split the night. Grass and mud were sent flying once more.

The monster flew into the grass several dozen zhang away, breaking many bones on the way.

The petite figure landed in front of Chen Changsheng and Guan Feibai, its body swaying for a moment.

It was Nanke.

The monster knew of Nanke's terrifying speed and didn't dare linger anymore. Turning around, he drilled into the grass.

Nanke knew that if this monster were to flee underground, it would be incredibly difficult to catch, so she prepared to pursue.

Just when she was prepared to move, her body swayed again. It was clear that she had suffered significant injuries from the previous collision.

This time, a different figure jumped down from a tall tree.

Zhexiu had arrived.

Seeing the scene laid out before him, he didn't even think, much less calculate, only charged over according to his customary way of fighting.

Like a meteorite, he jumped down from the tree towards the new hole in the grass.

With a boom, the earth quaked and the river roiled. Grass, leaves, and mud jumped into the air once more, obscuring the starlight and casting a gloom over the scene.

The dust gradually settled, revealing the scene on the ground. A massive pit had appeared that went a zhang deep into the ground. One could faintly see ripples of water at the bottom.

The first saying is '锋芒毕露', which is a Chinese idiom meaning that one is showing off their abilities to their full extent. The difference between these two sayings, '锋芒毕露' and '锋芒必露', is that '必', though sharing the same pronunciation as '毕', means 'must', turning the display of one's full abilities into a matter of absolute necessity.

I have chosen to translate the term '剑罡' as 'Righteous Sword' because the word '罡' is formed from the words '四正', which mean 'Four Corrects/Rights'. In general, this term is used to indicate that one has made their body 'right/correct', hence 'Righteous Sword'.

The name 'Chusu', '除苏', quite literally means 'Remove Su[Li]'

Chapter 831 – On a Sleepless Night, Nothing to Do but Follow the Water

Zhexiu looked thoughtfully at the deep pit in the grass.

Chen Changsheng, Nanke, and Guan Feibai walked over. They noticed a few repulsive pieces of gray flesh scattered on the ground, presumably left behind by the monster.

Such a large turmoil in the back garden of the church had naturally alarmed many people. Linghai Zhiwang, An Lin, and the Archbishop of Wenshui, who had just gone to carry out their orders, had quickly rushed back.

Nobody spoke, only looked at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng said, "If I am not wrong, that monster is the Chusu that I asked all of you to investigate just now."

Linghai Zhiwang asked, "The Longevity Sect?"

Chen Changsheng thought for a while, then replied, "I suspect that it is the result of the previous Sect Master of the Longevity Sect's Corpse Beheading before he died."

Linghai Zhiwang and the others were all deeply learned and experienced, so upon hearing the words 'Corpse Beheading', they associated it with that insidious Daoist technique Chen Changsheng had mentioned earlier, and their expressions flickered.

Guan Feibai cared more about another question, which he asked to Chen Changsheng. "Chusu? Which two words are those?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "It should be the two words that you're thinking of."

When he had heard the name 'Chusu' earlier, Guan Feibai had felt that something was strange. The name had made his body inexplicably shiver, and now he finally understood where it had

come from. He harshly said, "So it turns out that the Longevity Sect still hasn't forgotten that old grudge. With just that monster alone, they want to deal with Martial Granduncle?"

Zhexiu said, "This monster has a powerful strength, a pure Daoist technique, an evil Qi, and most troublesome of all are its body of poison, speed, and ability to flee underground. It can appear in our vicinity at any time and assassinate us. It's extremely terrifying."

He was the most frightening ambusher and assassin of the snowy plains, and now, even he had admitted the danger this monster presented.

These words cast a silence over them all.

Despite the protection of the Daoist church's array and Guan Feibai close by, that monster had still managed to silently approach Chen Changsheng and initiate a sinister sneak attack. Even more frightening was that even after receiving powerful blows from Guan Feibai, Nanke, and Zhexiu in succession, the monster had only suffered wounds and not died on the spot.

Although these three people were young, they were some of the strongest and most fearless of the younger generation of cultivators.

This monster was far from enough to deal with Su Li, but if it were hidden amongst the crowd and struck out at a random moment, it would truly be difficult to defend against.

"In the future, everyone should be more careful."

Chen Changsheng looked to Guan Feibai and cautioned, "Especially you. If you encounter Chusu in the future, don't lightly resort to those killing moves that exchange wound for wound. Although I've never touched it, I can sense that the poison on its body is very troublesome. Even I might not be able to cure it."

He was referring to how Guan Feibai had earlier been prepared to use the final move of the Mount Li Sword Style to recklessly fight

against the monster.

"I'll be more careful, but what about you? Are you injured?" Guan Feibai looked at Chen Changsheng's ankles.

Chen Changsheng replied, "I'm fine."

A few of those black strands had still been on his ankle a few moments ago, but they had withered away and been blown into nothingness by the wind.

Guan Feibai then turned to Nanke and thought, you directly struck against that monster's body; were you not worried about being poisoned?

Immediately after, he recalled her true identity and understood that he was overthinking things.

The blood of the Surpassing Bird was the most poisonous substance in the world, so how could she be afraid of poison?

Linghai Zhiwang suddenly harshly reprimanded Chen Changsheng. "I also request that Your Holiness be more prudent, avoiding at all costs the previous situation."

Earlier, Chen Changsheng had sent their group of three off with orders, but he had not had Nanke come to guard him, electing to stand alone in thought by the shore.

In Linghai Zhiwang's view, this was incredibly unwise and displayed a lack of responsibility to the Orthodoxy's millions of believers.

Chen Changsheng understood his good intentions and replied, "Do not worry. I still haven't fully recovered, so was slow to activate my Qi, causing me to fall into such a situation. This won't happen in the future."

After saying this, he looked to the opposite shore.

So much noise had been made in the Daoist church, but the opposite shore was still peaceful, with not a single person

appearing.

A few barking dogs could be heard in the distance.

The buildings lining the river cast their shadows on the street and water. Who knew what they were concealing?

.....

.....

Perhaps because the wine of Wenshui City was too authentic, or perhaps because the people often became lazy after basking in the warm light of the sun, Luo Bu did not leave after he finished drinking, but chose to stay the night in the inn behind the restaurant. He slept until late in the night, after which he inexplicably woke up.

He walked into the shadow of the alley next to the restaurant and gazed at the nearby river, wanting to confirm whether his feeling from the daytime had been a misperception or not.

He did not see that clump of water grass, as it had been approaching the opposite shore at that time, seeping through the cracks in the rocks to flow underneath the Daoist church.

He bore witness to everything that happened next.

That monster truly was unexpectedly savage and horrifying. Even he had subconsciously gripped his sword.

He did not attack at the beginning, because he was curious to see Chen Changsheng's true level.

He did not expect to see his junior brother.

He still did not move, because he trusted in his junior brother.

Of course, this was also because he firmly believed that he still had control over the situation.

Under the starlight, the Wenshui was like a broad belt of silver.

If Chen Changsheng or his junior brother really did encounter a

danger that they could not resolve, his sword would naturally go over, disregarding the broadness of the river.

What happened next also took him by surprise.

Chen Changsheng and his junior brother were actually unable to capture or kill that ambushing monster.

This monster actually could travel through the earth, and its speed was quite shocking, allowing it to instantly vanish into the depths of the Wenshui.

All these surprises ultimately made him feel rather helpless.

He had just found himself unable to sleep in the middle of night and gotten up to relieve his boredom, after which he intended to go back for a sound sleep.

In the end, he just had to see such a turmoil, and he had even seen the direction in which the monster ran off.

Thus, he could only follow.

.....

.....

The monster was in the bottom of the river, hiding himself in the mud and sand to stealthily and silently advance, but he was still moving very fast.

Luo Bu leapt from house to house, borrowing the shade of roofs and the occasional clouds flitting across the sky to conceal his figure. He was similarly silent and very fast.

At the end, he was not able to catch up to the monster, only see through the light ripples in the Wenshui that it had turned into a canal on the right and vanished into an estate.

He took out a charcoal pen and paper, and drew what he had just seen. The stars above the estate and the countless lanterns within all seemed incredibly lifelike.

The estate was truly large. The external appearance of the buildings within was very ordinary, but it could not conceal the aura of nobility.

He then noticed that he was outside the side gate of another estate.

The two estates faced each other across the river, each lit up by countless lanterns. Even in the late night, they did not appear deserted.

He walked into the estate.

Perhaps because the master of this estate was deathly ill and its young master had been imprisoned in the ancestral hall, morale was loose and the guard was not very heavy. From the houses and small courtyards on the perimeter of the estate, the voices of people could occasionally be heard, making the luxurious courtyard in the center seemed much more quiet and secluded.

In the luxurious courtyard, he saw the anxious faces of elderly and loyal servants, the miserable expressions of maids.

Soon after, he heard an argument from the corner gate.

"Clear up your heads! Master is on the verge of death, so who dares to fight with the Second Master?"

"The Pope? This place is the Wenshui Tang clan—they don't have to give face to anybody!"

"Don't think that just because the Pope has come, the chief branch has a backer, or why would that prodigal son still be kneeling in the ancestral hall?"

Chapter 832 – The Pope Comes to Visit the People of the Chief Branch

Luo Bu quietly listened for a while. This sort of story in which the dauntless servant deceived his master was a commonplace sight in all clans.

If a dog was continuing to bark louder and louder against its master, it might have gone crazy, but the more likely possibility was that it wanted to rely on a new master.

In order to prove their loyalty to their new master, these dogs would not mind madly barking at their original master, even biting him a few times.

He paid no attention to those butlers stinking with alcohol at the corner gate. He floated into the luxurious courtyard and came to the window of the main house.

Even in the late night, the room was still brightly lit. Perhaps it was because the master of the house had slept for too long and seemed about to sleep forever, so no one wanted to sleep.

The shellfish oil produced in Zhuo Province produced no smoke, nor would its fragrance assail the eyes. The light produced was also very beautiful, painting the face of the middle-aged man with a sheet of gold.

The middle-aged man was very beautiful, his eyes deeply sunken. Coupled with the layer of golden light over his face, he looked not like a living person, but like some sacrificial offering.

Luo Bu stood outside the window, calmly examining the middle-aged man. The fingers gripping his sword silently tapped, going faster and faster until they became a blur.

If the disciples of South Stream Temple were to see this, they might associate it with the movements of the Holy Maiden as she calculated on her Fated Star Plate.

Yes, he was calculating, but using his sword instead of a Fated Star Plate.

Ultimately, he could not find anything strange about this courtyard, could not calculate a single problem. It seemed that it truly was not poison.

If this truly was an illness, and Junior Sister could not cure it, then he definitely could not.

With some regret and apology, Luo Bu departed the estate and returned to the shore of the Wenshui.

Looking at the estate on the opposite shore, he silently thought, since this side is the chief branch, then the other side is the second branch?

.....

.....

On the first day of the Pope's visit to Wenshui, he refined a bottle of Cinnabar Pills.

On the second day, Orthodoxy Prefect Daoist Baishi, who had come to Wenshui to attend upon the Pope, vanished. The Pope was visited by the Tang Second Master, and at night, an assassination attempt was made on his life.

On the third day, he brought many people with him out of the Daoist church. Seated on a holy carriage, he traveled along the Wenshui and under countless worried gazes to an estate.

This estate was entirely owned by the Tang clan's chief branch. It had already been half a year since the deathly ill Tang First Master had been moved from the old estate to here.

It had also been half a year since Tang Thirty-Six had been imprisoned in the ancestral hall, but no one knew if these two matters were connected.

If this were a few days ago, the main gate of the estate would

assuredly have been tightly shut, those servants scattered about and gossiping about their master. Today was different, as when the Pope's holy carriage was still several li away, the estate had received the news. After the initial panic, all had become calm.

The middle gate had long been open, the stewards and servants kneeling on both sides. All was extremely deferential and silent, and one could see everywhere the standards of a noble clan.

But Chen Changsheng still felt that something was not quite right.

It was not because of the people concealed in the willows on the opposite shore keeping watch, but something in the air that smelled off.

Nanke was at his side, sniffing the air like a little dog. "There's ash."

The steward of the Tang clan's old estate had just arrived, having hurried over, but before he had time to say anything, he heard these words, and his expression couldn't help but flicker.

Chen Changsheng looked at the straight path of white marble at his feet. By the streaks of moisture on the surface, he could see that it had just been cleaned.

The reason it had just been cleaned was naturally to welcome him, but he could infer that it was normally not cleaned with much diligence.

Chen Changsheng said nothing as he walked into the estate.

Upon entering a luxurious courtyard, he saw a madam dressed in simple clothes, but still exuding a noble aura. Through her appearance, he could see that she was probably Tang Thirty-Six's mother.

Seeing the crowd enter the courtyard, especially the young man at the very center, the madam said in a trembling voice, "Faithful wife Lin Suyan pays respects to His Holiness the Pope."

After saying this, she prostrated towards Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng certainly would not accept such courtesy, saying, "Madam Tang can forego these formalities."

Madam Tang naturally would not rise just because of his words. She continued to kneel down.

Fortunately, Chen Changsheng had expected that this might happen and had already planned for it.

With a sudden breeze, before anyone knew what was happening, the little girl at the Pope's side had appeared at Madam Tang's side.

Nanke held Madam Tang's hand, making it very difficult for Madam Tang to continue bowing.

Seeing this, the steward from the Tang clan's old estate appeared unmoved, but a tinge of unease emerged in his mind.

Many people knew that when the Tang Second Master went to the Daoist church to call upon the Pope, the Pope had received his obeisance.

Everyone could understand the Pope's difference in treatment towards the chief branch and second branch, but what was the reason to express it so blatantly?

Chen Changsheng had not accepted Madam Tang's bow, and even greeted her as a member of the junior generation.

Only now did Madam Tang realize that the rumors were all true, that the letters that had been sent from the Orthodox Academy back then were also true.

The Pope and her son were truly very close, as intimate as brothers.

"I want to go and see Uncle," Chen Changsheng said.

Madam Tang had no reason to refuse, and prepared to guide him.

A sudden bout of coughing interrupted them.

The steward from the old estate coughed twice, then glanced at Madam Tang. He then turned to Chen Changsheng and said with a meek expression, "The First Master's illness is very serious. Given the importance of Your Holiness's divine body, if something were to happen, it would truly be my Tang clan's sin, and to request Your Holiness..."

Without hearing to the end, one could clearly understand the meaning: the Tang clan did not wish for Chen Changsheng to see the master of the chief branch.

Chen Changsheng had once seen this steward. Years ago, it was this steward that had delivered the Yellow Paper Umbrella to him.

They were reunited today, and the steward's manner was even more respectful than it was in the past, but there was also a vague guarded feeling from him.

Chen Changsheng said nothing, only calmly looked at him.

The steward suddenly felt like the pressure on him had increased, but he still forced himself to say, "The professors of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green have come before, and even... that person from Holy Maiden Peak personally paid a visit. None of them could do anything, so why must Your Holiness stir grief in your believers?"

Madam Tang glanced at the steward, not refuting him, but her sleeves slightly trembled.

Chen Changsheng suddenly asked, "Has the venerable Daoist master visited?"

The old estate's steward thought that he had heard incorrectly, and was mystified as to how to respond. With the venerable Daoist's status, how could he leave the capital and come to Wenshui just to treat the First Master?

Chen Changsheng then asked, "Then has His Majesty the Emperor visited?"

The steward was even more confused, thinking, His Majesty has to attend to numerous affairs every day, so how could he come?

"In this world, only they are superior to me in the medical arts. Since neither of them came, just who has more authority than me to say whether or not this illness is curable?"

After saying this, he followed Madam Tang into the courtyard, paying no more attention to the steward.

Linghai Zhiwang and his several dozen priests remained, barring the people of the Tang clan outside.

The old estate's steward wanted to use his status to follow inside, but he did not succeed.

Linghai Zhiwang impassively stared at him and said, "You like to cough? Then continue."

The steward had a most esteemed status in Wenshui City, but what could he do to a Prefect of the Orthodoxy?

As he watched Chen Changsheng disappear into the corridors of the courtyard, he was both anxious and angry, so he really did begin to cough.

Chapter 833 – I Dearly Wish to See the Old Master

Chen Changsheng knew that both the professors of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green and Xu Yourong had come to Wenshui and personally examined the chief branch master's illness, but he still decided to personally take a look.

Just like he had said to the old estate's steward, he had complete confidence in his medical skills.

Even if everyone had determined that the chief branch's master was not poisoned, but afflicted with some incurable illness, he still would not believe until he had personally seen it.

He looked at the unconscious middle-aged man, wanting to find any traces of Tang Thirty-Six on his face, but found the task surprisingly difficult.

Perhaps it was because the man was too thin, or perhaps it was because of the golden light covering his face.

He sat on the side of the bed and took the man's pulse. After a few minutes, he took a needle and stuck it in the man's neck, beginning a more detailed examination.

This examination took much longer. Even when the winter sun had reached noon, his fingers still grasped the end of the needle, conducting an extremely rhythmic trembling.

The door to the room was tightly shut, preventing anyone from seeing inside, so no one knew what was happening.

Nanke stood in the front of the door, her face expressionless and her body unmoving.

No matter if it was Madam Tang personally bringing a brocade stool or the head maid offering a cup of precious tea with both hands, she did not even glance at them, much less speak.

At the very start, all the people of the chief branch could not suppress the happiness on their faces when they saw the Pope enter the First Master's room. In their view, since the Pope could refine the miraculous Cinnabar Pills, his medical skills must be superb. Even if the Sacred Light technique had been unable to save the First Master, the Cinnabar Pill should have been able to succeed. But as time passed, they gradually began to worry. Some of the bolder maids even wanted to sneak a glance, but they were forced back by Nanke's gaze.

After a long time, the door of the room finally opened and Chen Changsheng came out.

Madam Tang went up to meet him. Although she had been able to maintain a calm composure, she now found it impossible to control herself, her face full of anxiety and tinged with hope.

Seeing Madam Tang's face, Chen Changsheng decided to take back what he had planned to say.

After such a long examination with the needle, he had an extremely deep understanding of the Tang First Master's body, but the more he understood, the stranger he found it. There truly was no trace of poison in the Tang First Master's body, nor were there any symptoms of poisoning. His meridians were just drying up, his life continuing to fade away.

The problem was that he could not find any cause of illness, so there was naturally nothing he could treat. And there was also another very strange thing. In the depths of the primary opening of the Tang First Master's liver meridians, he could faintly sense a few traces of cold and sinister Qi, but this Qi was too faint to trace. It could have been remnants from an old illness from many years ago, but it could also be...

"Has the Tang First Master ever been injured around his waist?" he asked Madam Tang.

Madam Tang earnestly recalled and shook her head. "He's been

injured many times, but he's truly never been injured around his waist."

Chen Changsheng suddenly noticed a perplexed look on Nanke's face and asked, "What's wrong?"

Nanke looked at him and said, "I feel like I've smelled something."

Chen Changsheng thought, could it really be? He turned around and brought her into the room, saying, "Carefully smell."

Nanke sniffed the air like a small dog, her feet constantly moving, bringing her closer and closer to the bed.

Finally, she stopped next to the bed and nodded at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng understood what she meant.

Madam Tang was very intelligent, so though she did not understand Nanke's specific meaning, she had a vague inkling of what was meant. Her face instantly turned snow-white and her body swayed.

Chen Changsheng looked at her and shook her head.

A determined expression appeared on Madam Tang's face and she steadied both her body and mind.

At this moment, the sounds of weeping could be heard from beyond the second gate. There were both men and women weeping, the old and young. (TN: The second gate refers to a gate behind the main gate that leads into the main courtyard.)

"The skies have cleared up! Master, you can finally be saved!"

"Your Holiness the Pope's benevolence stretches to the heavens! I, Hu San, am willing to be Your Holiness's workhorse!"

"Master! You're going to wake up soon!"

Hearing these voices, the maids in the inner courtyard showed

expressions of disgust while the few stewards and elderly maids became absolutely furious. If not for the fact that the Pope was present, they would have begun to curse. Instead they resentfully spat, "These shameless fools aren't truly concerned for Master, they're just worried that if Master really is saved by Your Holiness, Master will get rid of them!"

Chen Changsheng had grown up in a Daoist temple, so he had never seen this wicked side of noble clans, and he couldn't help but be a little shocked.

"In this half year, with Little Tang in the ancestral hall praying for his father, and me anxious over treating Master's illness, I have been somewhat lacking in discipline to my subordinates. Disturbing Your Holiness in such a way is truly disrespectful of me."

Madam Tang apologized and invited him to rest in a partitioned study.

The study was very quiet, shutting out those insincere sobs from nearby.

Besides Madam Tang and him, only Nanke had followed inside.

With no outsiders present, Madam Tang was finally able to reveal her true emotions. Her eyes slightly red, she said, "Many thanks for Your Holiness's benevolence in saving the First Master's life. This Tang clan's business can all be given over to the second branch. I only hope that the First Master can live and Little Tang can be released."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Be at ease, Madam. Everything is done with the First Master's and Tang Tang's safety as the highest priority."

Only after looking into his eyes and confirming that he was speaking the truth did Madam Tang truly relax. She said, "Today, I still might need to borrow Your Holiness's divine might."

Chen Changsheng understood her meaning and replied, "Madam can use it however you please."

.....

.....

When they returned to the Daoist church, it was nearly dusk. As the setting sun shone over the Wenshui, Chen Changsheng once more came to the shore.

The lawn of the back garden had long since been repaired. No trace of last night's assassination attempt could be seen.

Archbishop An Lin and Guan Feibai kept close to him, unwilling to have last night repeat itself.

After a short while, Linghai Zhiwang returned, bringing with him the latest news.

For the crime of offending the Pope, Madam Tang had had three second-ranked stewards and ten-some servants caned to death, and driven away seven or eight old maids.

While the punishments were being meted out, Linghai Zhiwang had stood on the side. He had said nothing, so nobody dared to speak.

The stewards of the Tang clan's old estate had an extremely nasty expression, but he had ultimately remained silent.

Guan Feibai felt rather melancholy after hearing about what had taken place in the Tang clan's chief branch.

He and Gou Hanshi, as well as the vast majority of the Mount Li Sword Sect's disciples, had all grown up in poverty. Other than their eldest brother, they had an innate hostility towards all the descendants of noble clans. It was for this reason that Tang Thirty-Six's behavior in the Ivy Festival had upset him.

He had expected that while poverty had the hardships of poverty, noble clans had their own hardships, and they were much darker,

relatives treating each other with even more cruelty and ruthlessness. If the Tang First Master really did die of illness and if Tang Thirty-Six remained imprisoned in the ancestral hall, just how unendurable would the widowed Madam Tang find the following days?

"We need to find some way of getting that fellow out as quickly as possible," he said to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng was thinking of somewhat more.

Besides rescuing Tang Thirty-Six from the ancestral hall, they also had to make sure that the Tang First Master's illness was put on the path of improvement.

But to resolve these two matters, he still needed to ascertain the Tang clan's position.

He said to the Archbishop of Wenshui, "Arrange a visit with the Tang Old Master tomorrow."

Chapter 834 – That Generation of Elders

Just like how the Tianhai clan was never able to represent the Tianhai Divine Empress, in Chen Changsheng's view, the Tang Second Master naturally could not represent the Tang clan.

If he wanted to make clear the Tang clan's stance, he had to personally meet the Tang Old Master.

The Archbishop of Wenshui showed a rare awkward expression. "Logically speaking, he truly should have come to visit Your Holiness, but the Tang Old Master has never met guests unless he wants to meet them. When the Divine Empress dispatched Mo Yu to Wenshui to invite him into the capital, the Old Master... didn't even accept the decree."

Chen Changsheng replied, "You've misunderstood. I am saying that I will go to the old estate tomorrow to visit the Tang Old Master."

The archbishop was flabbergasted, thinking, Your Holiness is the Pope. Even if you consider yourself as a junior through your relationship with the Tang Young Master, there is no reason for you to go on your own to the old estate. Is this not beneath your status?

Linghai Zhiwang had a rather unpleasant expression, intending to voice his objection.

Chen Changsheng did not give them the chance. "Deliver the message. I will wait for the response."

At this moment, they finally understood that the Pope wanted to use this matter to determine something.

The archbishop left to carry out the order. In a short while, the Tang clan's old estate sent their response.

Just as everyone had predicted, the Tang Old Master did not agree.

The reason given by the old estate was that he had gotten a cold.

Everyone knew that an important figure like the Tang Old Master could not possibly get a cold. This was naturally an excuse.

Of course, that the old estate was willing to make an excuse was already giving a great deal of face to the Pope.

Anyone else, even so-called important personages like Wuqiong Bi or the Prince of Xiang, would just have received a flat rejection from the Tang Old Master, no excuse required.

But Chen Changsheng did not think that the Tang Old Master was giving him face.

He stood at the river in quiet contemplation for a very long time, and then he smiled.

The evening glow painted the sky, and it also illuminated his still-young face. His smile was very clean and pleasant.

His mood right now was truly excellent.

In Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, he had decided to go to Wenshui. Starting from that day, he had a worry on his mind.

He was worried that the Tang Old Master's will was set. He was worried that the Tang Second Master's actions were the collective will of the Tang clan.

It now seemed that he no longer needed to worry.

Because the Tang Old Master did not dare to meet him.

.....

.....

In the Orthodox Academy, Chen Changsheng had said something to Eunuch Lin, and he later on also said it to his martial uncle the Pope: his master Shang Xingzhou did not dare to meet him. What he meant by 'did not dare' was not that his master feared him or was too much of a coward to face him. Rather, it referred to the

fact that Shang Xingzhou was not willing to meet him because he would have to confront a few questions that he did not want to confront.

He believed that the Tang Old Master did not dare to meet him for similar reasons. It wasn't that the Tang Old Master didn't dare to meet him, but rather that the Tang Old Master didn't dare to meet the questions that accompanied, was not willing to be persuaded. This just so happened to indicate that the Tang Old Master was well aware that there was a chance he could be persuaded by Chen Changsheng.

"Make preparations to accompany me tomorrow to the old estate."

Chen Changsheng said to everyone, then said to Guan Feibai, "You are injured, so remain in the church."

Everyone was deeply confused, thinking, didn't the Tang clan's old estate already reject your request? The Tang Old Master isn't willing to meet you; do you think you can just force your way in?

"The Old Master has a cold and so cannot meet with guests. Even if I am the Pope, it is still no good."

Chen Changsheng added, "But I also happen to be a doctor."

.....

.....

The Pope could not force his way into the Tang clan's old estate, but would his status as doctor really be able to change anything?

Even if this doctor was the best doctor for treating colds, so what? They would still have to give advance notice first. On the same night, the Daoist church communicated to the Tang clan's old estate that the Pope was prepared tomorrow to visit the Tang Old Master, and even stated that the Pope was deeply concerned about the Tang Old Master's health.

On the morning of the next day, Chen Changsheng's group left the Daoist church, escorted by cavalry and priests.

When the Pope's holy carriage arrived on the main street of Wenshui City, the old estate still had not indicated that it approved.

Chen Changsheng did not have any intention of waiting. He ordered the carriage to continue forward.

Yesterday, he had gone to the chief branch's estate to visit the First Master, but today he was going to the old estate to treat the Old Master. He brought with him countless precious medicinal ingredients prepared by the Orthodoxy and endless kindness. Could the Tang clan possibly be moved to rage by this and seal off the road to the old estate?

Such an unreasonable thing was not something a clan that had persisted for thousands of generations could do.

Despite the fact that many people in the Tang clan did not want him to go to the old estate, did not want him to meet the Tang Old Master, they could only watch the Pope's holy carriage proceed along the street. It passed the white walls and black eaves of the ancestral hall, getting closer and closer to the old estate, but nothing happened.

The gate to the Tang clan's ancestral hall was tightly shut. What was that fellow locked inside doing right now?

Chen Changsheng did not even glance at the gate of the ancestral hall, but he still thought of these questions. He then recalled that it was still rather early in the day. Given that fellow's lazy personality, he was probably still sleeping and was completely unaware that he and Zhexiu were passing right by his door.

When they reached the Tang clan's old estate, would they also see only a tightly-shut gate?

This possibility was most concerning to Linghai Zhiwang and the

others, and it was also a possibility that was extremely likely to become reality.

Chen Changsheng was not worried that he might be refused entrance.

No one understood why, even though the Tang Old Master was not willing to meet, he still seemed so confident.

Presumably, the Tang Old Master would also be very curious upon hearing this news.

.....

.....

The Tang clan's old estate was on the southernmost edge of Wenshui City, very far from the Daoist church and necessitating a long period of travel.

The city gate had been closed some time ago. To be more precise, ever since the city gate had been closed last night, it had not been opened again, even though the scheduled time had long since passed.

Besides the Orthodoxy's carriage and cavalry, no one else could be seen on the streets. The Tang clan had not sent any stewards or even someone to guide the way.

The long street was quiet and still, the only sounds the easygoing trots of warhorses and the rolling of carriage wheels across the flagstones.

A gust of wind blew from the river, carrying with it a sheet of old paper. This paper was stained with oil, hinting that it might have been used to wrap meat.

A black dog ran out from an alley and sniffed at the paper. Finding the paper of no interest, it turned and left.

Chen Changsheng noticed that this black dog was rather old, but its fur was still smooth, it seemed in excellent health, and there

was a collar around its neck. It was clearly being raised by some family.

"I've never seen a stray dog in Wenshui City before."

He thought of this point and felt it rather strange.

Logically speaking, as populous and affluent a place as Wenshui City should have been a very comfortable place for a stray dog to live.

Would Wenshui City have driven away all its stray dogs just because he was coming?

Linghai Zhiwang had had a similar question many years ago when he first visited Wenshui City and answered, "There are no stray dogs here."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Why?"

Linghai Zhiwang explained, "They were given to homes to raise, killed, or eaten. In short, there are no stray dogs."

This explanation was given very plainly, yet it seemed to contain a profounder meaning that instilled an inexplicable chill in the listener.

Chen Changsheng thought, from a certain perspective, the Tang Old Master and my master Shang Xingzhou are truly very similar people.

.....

.....

That generation of people were all very similar.

Indeed, three years ago the Elder of Heavenly Secrets died and the Pope died. This year, the Demon Lord finally died.

Other than Wang Zhice, who was traveling in parts unknown, the only members remaining from that generation were Shang Xingzhou and the Tang Old Master.

Which generation was that generation?

This was the generation that had experienced vast lands of scorched earth, a beleaguered people, the demon invasion, the siege of Luoyang, and a time when one's life and death only spanned a few days.

It was precisely because they had experienced so much pain and tragedy, endured a pressure that humans today would find impossible to imagine, that those people had such incomparably tenacious wills. Like the firm rocks of a solitary peak or the green pines growing on those rocks, no matter what sort of miserable or even despairing circumstances they were in, they would never give up. Calmly and collectedly, they would confront it, always embracing their dreams.

Similarly, because they had experienced too much, and borne witness to far too cruel and dark a period of history, they had unsurprisingly become the firmest of realists, the most callous of schemers. Sinister strategies, a broad-minded outlook, and far-off goals harmonized in their aging bodies without the slightest conflict.

Ultimately, they became the elders in this world that were most worthy of respect, required respect, and struck fear into all living beings.

The Tang Old Master that Chen Changsheng wanted to see today was this sort of person.

.....

.....

The Tang clan's old estate was in the southern part of the city. Contrary to what the common people might expect, the old estate was far smaller than the estates of the chief branch and the second branch, not occupying too great of an area at all. Moreover, it was not on the shore of the Wenshui, but built along a rather low hill.

It looked rather ordinary, devoid of anything remarkable.

Chen Changsheng's party had not encountered a single person on their journey from the Daoist church to here. Now, they finally saw someone.

The steward from the old estate he had met yesterday at the chief branch's estate was standing on the side of the street, a humble expression on his face. Behind him stood another elder.

This elder had an expression as cold as an autumn sun, an apathetic visage, and had restrained his Qi.

The sight of this elder caused a smear of red to suddenly emerge in Zhexiu's eyes and Nanke to release her grip on Chen Changsheng's sleeve.

As the two people present most sensitive to danger, Zhexiu and Nanke had immediately sensed this elder's terrifying power.

Linghai Zhiwang's complexion instantly turned abnormally solemn as he exclaimed, "Half step from the Divine!"

If not for the portrait in the Moss Institute, he would even have thought that this elder was the Tang Old Master that the Pope had come to visit.

This elder's cultivation truly was unfathomable.

Chen Changsheng's party was unaware that this elder was one of the Tang clan's three precious old Guardians. In the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, at the critical juncture, this old Guardian had been at the Tang Second Master's side. From this, one could understand the status and power this elder held in the Tang clan.

And yet this old Guardian who was only half a step from the Divine was just a guide to the Tang clan's old estate today.

Just how deep was the Tang clan's hidden strength?

At this point, Linghai Zhiwang finally realized that no matter how absurd the common people imagined the Tang clan to be, the

truth was still shocking.

He became incredibly wary and concerned over Chen Changsheng's safety in all this.

But neither he, nor Zhexiu, nor Nanke was allowed to follow Chen Changsheng into the Tang clan's old estate.

Because that old Guardian had given him an emotionless glance.

And then, Chen Changsheng shook his head.

Chapter 835 – The Old Estate's Ancient Well, Pickled Vegetables and Porridge

Chen Changsheng was welcomed by a very simple wooden gate.

But the stone ledge over the gate was built with meticulous care, and it was ridiculously tall, even higher than the gate itself. From top to bottom, it was covered in countless wooden tablets.

Chen Changsheng raised his head and could make out many familiar signatures.

These signatures belonged to generations of Emperors and Popes.

There were Emperors from the Zhou Dynasty, Emperors from the previous dynasty, and even the esteemed names of Emperors from even more ancient times that he had only ever heard about in history books.

The names of those Popes were even more familiar. He realized that the name of the Pope at the very bottom was that of his martial grandteacher.

The Emperor at the very bottom was Emperor Taizong.

There was no Tianhai Divine Empress and no Pope of the previous generation.

It was clear that those two that had passed before the elder within the Tang clan's old estate, his peer that was the previous Pope and the Tianhai Divine Empress that he disliked, had not gained the right to leave behind their marks.

The Tang clan's old Guardian stood on the side. His expression did not change, nor did he prompt Chen Changsheng to move on.

The elders of the Tang clan had witnessed this sort of scene countless times over the countless years.

These were the true foundational resources of the Tang clan, as

this was a visible history, absolutely real and even somewhat vivid.

It suddenly began to snow. The snow did not fall too forcefully, drifting and dancing about the old estate.

Chen Changsheng took out an old umbrella from somewhere and unfurled it, after which he walked into the courtyard.

The old Guardian's expression finally changed somewhat upon seeing this old umbrella. His eyes slightly narrowed, but it was impossible to see what he was thinking.

The main gate of the old estate was very simple, as was its main courtyard. Flat gray stones paved the ground. Washed by the rains of innumerable years and stepped on by the feet of countless people, they were as smooth as mirrors. When walking upon it, it was hard not to think that Emperor Taizong had also walked through this place, that the stone one stepped on might also have been stepped on by Zhou Dufu, that Wang Zhice might have taken a drink of water from that old well over there. When Su Li walked into this small courtyard, was he holding an umbrella?

The Tang clan's old Guardian stopped at the gate to the courtyard.

Chen Changsheng, umbrella in hand, walked up the stone steps and reached the house. He looked inside.

Inside and outside were separated by a very high threshold.

He stood outside the threshold.

The elder stood within the threshold.

In truth, although this person's hair was completely white, he did not seem old.

But his eyes were like the old well in the courtyard, undisturbed no matter what happened.

Was this the Tang Old Master?

.....

.....

For the past thousand years, the most mysterious individual of the continent was naturally the Demon Military Advisor Black Robe.

To many people, the Tang Old Master of Wenshui City was equally mysterious.

The people only knew that the Tang Old Master was the wealthiest person in the world. Even when the Elder of Heavenly Secrets still lived, he was still poorer than the Tang Old Master.

The people also knew that the Tang Old Master was one of the most powerful people on the continent. Even the Tianhai Divine Empress had been incapable of dealing with him.

The people also knew that the Tang Old Master was the oldest person in the continent. People had seen him far before Emperor Taizu's era.

But nobody knew how much money the Tang Old Master actually had, how terrifying was the strength he actually controlled, and how many years he had actually lived.

And up until today, nobody knew just what the Tang Old Master's true level of cultivation was.

Not even the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had been able to find out. Of course, even if they had, they wouldn't have dared to mention it.

Upon becoming clan head, the Tang Old Master never fought with a single person, and several centuries had now passed.

A person analyzed that the Tang Old Master had assuredly already stepped into the Divine Domain. However, since he did not care for any reputation in the vulgar world, the common people did not know. How else could he have been able to uphold the sky over Wenshui City, to contend as equal against the Saints, and have the vast majority of the Storms of the Eight Directions respect

him as if they were juniors?

Of course, there were also many people who rejected this theory. They believed that the Tang clan had relied on its unimaginable wealth and deep-rooted power to hold such a lofty status in the continent. The Tang Old Master was simply excellent at managing the clan and certainly not as powerful as others might imagine.

Regardless of which theory one subscribed to, they were all theories, and it appeared as if they would never receive evidence.

Still no one knew just what sort of person the Tang Old Master was.

Besides a few elders of Wenshui City and the few descendants living in the Tang clan's old estate, no one even knew what the Tang Old Master looked like.

In the capital at the Orthodox Academy, Chen Changsheng had heard Tang Thirty-Six talk about the Tang Old Master many times. In Tang Thirty-Six's words, his grandfather was a kind and amusing old man who liked to put his sole grandson on his lap and tell him stories.

The Moon of the Demon race traveled through the cotton-like clouds, making sails in the wind seem in the night like rope made of stars.

Scenery could change at any moment, so people naturally had many sides that were also changing.

The grandfather that existed in Tang Thirty-Six's eyes naturally could not be the true Tang Old Master, or at least not the entirety of the Tang Old Master.

Moreover, the Tang Old Master now had another grandson.

.....

.....

Several years ago, when Chen Changsheng was going to Hanqiu

City, he had passed through Wenshui. The Tang Old Master had sent him a gift, but had not met him.

Today was his first time seeing the Tang Old Master. Even he could not help but feel somewhat nervous.

But he did not show it.

He calmly shook off the snow on the umbrella. Closing up the umbrella, he leaned it on the wall, then crossed over the threshold and entered the room.

Whether in movements or expression, he seemed very at ease, acting like he was returning home.

The Tang Old Master was even more at ease, as this was his home.

The Tang Old Master was eating porridge. He was eating with great appetite, the sound of his eating clear and distinct.

Besides the bowl of porridge, there were a few plates of pickled vegetables on the table. It all looked very ordinary.

In a short while, the Tang Old Master finished eating the porridge. He took a towel and wiped his mouth, then said to Chen Changsheng, "There is a vulgar phrase that says, '[The old gentleman drinks porridge, not knowing the meaning of shame.](#)' I've recently been paying more attention to my health precisely because I don't want to deal with this saying."

Chen Changsheng thought for a while before understanding the meaning.

He glanced at the remnants of the porridge in the bowl, thought, and then said, "If you want strong teeth, you can't eat food that's too hard, but eating porridge every meal is also inappropriate."

The Tang Old Master returned the towel to the table and replied, "It's not like I suddenly hate life, so how could I eat porridge every day? This is just breakfast."

Chen Changsheng did not continue along this line, saying, "If one wants to keep in good health, millet or oats porridge is a superb choice. Rice, on the contrary, can easily harm the stomach."

The Tang Old Master glanced at him and asked, "You are an expert in these matters?"

Chen Changsheng calmly stated, "My medical skills might be inferior to Master's, but in terms of staying healthy, he is inferior to me."

The Tang Old Master looked at him and said, "Since you yourself admit that your medical skills are not on par with your master's, why is it that you've come to visit me and say that you'll treat my cold?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Treating illnesses and saving people is the duty of a doctor, and I am the Pope, which makes it even more my duty."

The Tang Old Master's expression did not change. "You feel that your master has no right to treat illnesses and save lives?"

Chen Changsheng's expression also did not change. [If the names are not correct, then language does not accord with the truth. If language does not accord with the truth, then affairs cannot succeed.](#)

This was a very meaningful saying. If someone like the Prince of Xiang were to hear it, they might savor it for an even longer period of time, attempting to taste from it even more meanings.

The saying the Old Master refers to, '老太爷喝稀饭, 无耻下流', is a 'xiehouyu', which involves saying the first part, pausing, and then giving the second part, which is the 'answer'. In this case, the original saying is, 'the old lady drinks porridge—doesn't know the meaning of shame'. This is a play on words, as '无耻', 'shameless', shares the same pronunciation as '无齿', 'toothless'. '下流' can just mean 'drinking down', but it also has more obscene and sexual

connotations.

This saying is from the Analects, and is the heart of Confucius's 'Rectification of Names', the philosophy that all names, which in this case means social names, need to fulfill their required social duties, the 'rectification', in order for society to properly function. Chen Changsheng's meaning here is perhaps more direct, as it must be recalled that Shang Xingzhou is not known as a doctor, but Daoist Ji is a famous one. These 'incorrect names' perhaps deprive Shang Xingzhou of his social duty as doctor. Reading more deeply, Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng share a teacher-student relationship, but since Shang Xingzhou has not lived up to his duty as teacher, Chen Changsheng does not need to fulfill his role as a student.

Chapter 836 – A Cup of Tea

The Tang Old Master looked into Chen Changsheng's eyes and asked, "Even if he taught an Emperor and a Pope, he still does not have the right?"

Chen Changsheng calmly replied, "Since one is an Emperor and one is a Pope, he should let them do their jobs."

The young eagle chick had already left the nest and begun learning how to fly; the small sapling was already sturdy enough to resist the wind and rain. Thus, they should be allowed to freely mature.

Only this way could the eagle soar towards the horizon, could the tree tower to the skies and gain more rain and sunlight.

"In Xining Village's old temple, all the books were given to me and everything else was given to Senior. No matter how vast the family property, it still has to be passed on to one's descendants in the end."

Chen Changsheng continued, "Let alone the fact that this is not Master's property, but the world."

The Tang Old Master did not speak.

The old estate's steward walked out from some place and speedily cleaned up the dishes on the table, not making a single sound.

After a while, a tea pot and two tea cups were placed on the table, but tea had not been poured into the cups.

Chen Changsheng gave the Tang Old Master a formal bow to be expected from a junior. Then, without waiting for a response, he walked over to the table and sat down.

He raised the tea pot and filled the cup in front of the Tang Old Master, after which he filled the cup in front of him.

He felt like he had returned to the past, to the stone table in the

Hundred Herb Garden. With this feeling, the last remnants of tension vanished, and he truly calmed down.

The Tang Old Master clearly sensed the change in his mood and revealed a hint of admiration.

"I also don't like the phrase 'the world is my property'," he said to Chen Changsheng. "But do you feel that you have the right to treat the world?"

'Treat' was treating illness, but it was also treating the ills of the country, governance.

Chen Changsheng replied, "I am confident that Senior has this ability. As for me, I am also learning."

The Tang Old Master fell into another long period of silence. Suddenly, he asked, "What was your first feeling upon entering the old estate?"

Chen Changsheng very seriously pondered this question, then replied, "It was more ordinary than I imagined. Even those wooden tablets above the gate, I found very intentional, and I found this intention ordinary."

To an ordinary clan, or even to those famous sects and clans, the wooden tablets over the gate of the Tang clan's old estate were a supreme glory. But with regard to the Tang clan, this sort of glory was somewhat intentionally displayed, as the Tang clan did not need these things. On the contrary, such glory actually diluted the Tang clan's mystery. Using Chen Changsheng's words, it made the Tang clan seem ordinary.

The Tang Old Master replied, "Because the old estate has always been a very ordinary courtyard. The reason it is unusual is that the heads of the Tang clan have lived here."

Chen Changsheng understood the Old Master's meaning.

Many people believed that the mystery of the Tang Old Master arose from the fact that he had never fought with anyone and that

the Tang clan was too frightening, leaving no one who dared to show him the slightest disrespect. His true level of strength could not possibly be as frightening as imagined.

But the meaning of the words the Tang Old Master spoke to Chen Changsheng was very clear.

The Tang clan was so terrifying because all the heads of the Tang clan had been very powerful, including the Old Master.

Chen Changsheng replied, "But since Sir is willing to meet me in the old estate, it means that Sir is willing to hear a few words from me."

The Tang Old Master commented, "It has already been many years since I've met an outsider. You are the fifth outsider that I have met in the old estate in these past few years."

Chen Changsheng knew that Su Li and Wang Po were assuredly included amongst these five. He just didn't know if Mo Yu had been able to meet the Tang Old Master on her visit to Wenshui, but if she had not, who were the other two people?

"Xu Yourong. I have a good relationship with her," the Tang Old Master explained. "That I am willing to meet you today is in large part because I am very curious to see just what the person she loves looks like."

This time, Chen Changsheng was truly shocked. It was only a couple nights ago that he learned that, before her absolute seclusion, Xu Yourong had come to Wenshui to examine the Tang clan chief branch master's illness. He had not expected that she also had this level of relationship with the Tang clan. He thought in confusion, although Xu Yourong is the Holy Maiden of the south and has a high enough status to converse with the Tang Old Master, there's such a vast discrepancy in age, so where are they similar? Why did the Tang Old Master say that he has a good relationship with her?

The Tang Old Master said, "There are countless types of relationships in the world: friends, lovers, comrades-in-arms, commercial allies... These relationships each have their own disadvantages, their own entanglements, and all variety of falsehoods and concessions. Only one relationship is most real and simple, where one can clearly see what the other is thinking, and without taxing the mind too greatly."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Which relationship is this?"

The Tang Old Master placed his cup down and lightly knocked on the table. "Mahjong partner."

Chen Changsheng fell into a long stupor.

Only now did he notice that this table in front of the Tang Old Master was not an ordinary dining table. The table was square and made from the most precious iron pear wood. The surface of the table was extremely smooth, but careful examination would reveal many fine grooves on it. One could imagine that some sort of hard object had formed these grooves through years and years of grinding. He then discovered that a small, flat box was hidden on each side of the table. Were they meant for holding silver banknotes?

This was actually a mahjong table.

The Tang Old Master had probably played mahjong on this table for centuries, going through countless mahjong partners.

And at some point, he had gained a new mahjong partner.

It was a girl from South Stream Temple.

"Yourong likes to play mahjong?" Chen Changsheng found this rather hard to imagine.

"She doesn't just like to play, she also plays it very well. Not even I am necessarily a match for her. There are many times where I've had the mind to call Little Po back."

The Tang Old Master's eyes were just like that old well in the courtyard, serene and flat, yet unfathomably deep. "But it's obvious that you don't like to play mahjong, let alone have the skill for it. This being the case, I advise that you not seat yourself at the table in the first place."

Saying this, he took up his tea cup and slowly took a sip, not caring whether the tea was hot or cold.

Taking up the tea cup was tantamount to sending off his guest. The tea in the cup was already half-consumed, so the guest should know that it would be difficult to get anywhere and retreat.

Chen Changsheng did not think this way.

He was well-versed in the Daoist Canon, knew astronomy and geography, and countless sword styles, but he didn't know how to spell the word 'difficult'.

He looked at the Tang Old Master and said, "Sir perhaps truly does not know what I want to say."

The Tang Old Master said nothing.

No matter how fiercely the wind blew, how could the bottom of the ancient well be disturbed?

If the Tang Old Master did not want to listen, who could force him to listen?

"Sir has drunk my tea," Chen Changsheng pointed out.

The Tang Old Master asked, "So what? And this is my tea."

Chen Changsheng replied, "In Xining's old temple, it was Senior Brother that boiled and poured the tea. In these past few years, I have only poured tea for one person."

Rather interested, the Tang Old Master asked, "Who?"

Chen Changsheng recalled those nights in the Hundred Herb Gardens, all sorts of emotions bubbling up within him as he said, "The Divine Empress."

Chapter 837 – Standing in the Snow

The entire continent knew that even the Tianhai Divine Empress had held a rather considerable respect for the Tang Old Master.

Chen Changsheng had learned from Tang Thirty-Six that even though the Tang Old Master cursed the Tianhai clan every day, these curses very rarely touched upon the Empress herself.

When the Tianhai Divine Empress issued a decree inviting the Tang Old Master into the capital, the Tang Old Master had refused to accept the decree. This was a very tough stance from which one could see a few problems in their relationship.

The Tang Old Master did not like the Tianhai Divine Empress. In his eyes, she was a Demon Empress.

But the Tianhai Divine Empress had always stirred dread in his heart, and in a few aspects, even admiration.

Chen Changsheng said, "In exchange for this cup of tea, I hope that Sir will hear two sentences of mine."

If he had said these two sentences of his own volition after entering the old estate, he naturally could have had the Tang Old Master hear them.

But hearing did not mean listening.

He wanted the Tang Old Master to very seriously hear his words, to listen to them.

To have those words enter his ear, enter his heart.

The Tang Old Master still said nothing, perhaps giving his silent consent.

"The Tang First Master is not ill, but poisoned."

This was Chen Changsheng's first sentence.

The Tang Old Master's expression did not change, as if he had not

heard those words.

"The Tang Second Master is colluding with the Demon race."

This was Chen Changsheng's second sentence.

The Tang Old Master slightly narrowed his eyes and then very slowly placed his cup back on the table.

He looked at Chen Changsheng, his voice devoid of emotion. "Your Holiness the Pope's sword is truly sharp, its trajectory very clear, but you should not have used it today."

These two sentences truly were swords.

They were two strikes of the Intellectual Sword that Chen Changsheng had prepared for a very long time.

This was a sword style he had learned from Su Li.

The Tang Old Master had known Su Li for many years and had a very close relationship with him, so how could he not recognize it?

Thus, for the first time, the Old Master addressed him as 'Your Holiness the Pope'.

Starting from this moment, there was no more senior and junior, no porridge and pickled vegetables, pouring and drinking tea, or an old relationship between mahjong partners.

"I did not voluntarily take out my sword, but was forced to use it in defense."

Chen Changsheng was not affected in any way by the Tang Old Master's stance, calmly saying, "On that night in the mountains, the Tang clan was the first to strike. Later on, in Hanqiu City and one night ago, someone wanted to kill me. This being the case, I have no reason to not respond."

The Tang Old Master gave a concise response: "Proof."

Even if Chen Changsheng was the Pope, he could not wantonly accuse the Tang clan of anything without proof.

This was the Tang clan's old estate, not the Mount Song Army headquarters. His opponents were not those princes and Divine Generals, but the Tang Old Master.

"I have no proof." Chen Changsheng did not wait for the Tang Old Master to express his opinion, but continued, "Besides those words from the Demon Lord, I do not have a single shred of proof, and the Demon Lord's words naturally could have been meant for sowing discord, but I do have a witness: Demon Princess Nanke. She is currently somewhat of an imbecile, so she certainly wouldn't lie."

The Tang Old Master narrowed his eyes even more. They did not seem like the eyes of an old fox, but a formidable sheet of rock in the mountains that had been battered by storms and eroded by wind for countless years.

"Then what does Your Holiness the Pope want me to agree to?"

"I need two hours."

"Time has always belonged to oneself."

"I need two hours of Wenshui City's time."

Chen Changsheng looked at the Tang Old Master and said, "In these two hours, I will find the Longevity Sect's monster. It will serve as proof."

What was meant by two hours of Wenshui City's time? He did not explicitly state his meaning, but the intent was loud and clear. For these two hours, he hoped that the Tang clan would hand control over Wenshui City to the Orthodoxy, and when the Orthodoxy conducted its search and pursuit, the Tang clan would not be able to interfere.

Without question, this was a fantastical and absurd request.

Over the countless years, no one, not even Emperor Taizong or the Tianhai Divine Empress, had been able to truly control Wenshui City.

This was what Chen Changsheng now wanted. Even if it was only for the brief span of two hours, it was still not something the Tang clan could accept.

The result of the negotiations was seemingly foreordained from the very start.

But Chen Changsheng still proposed it, because he hoped that that senior had been able to change the Tang Old Master's view.

Regretfully, his hopes were not realized.

"Three days ago, he sat where you were sitting and the words he said had about the same meaning as yours, but I did not agree."

The Tang Old Master expressionlessly gazed at him. "Unless Your Holiness the Pope can persuade him to change his surname, there is nothing to discuss."

There was a short pause, then Chen Changsheng asked, "Even if Sir clearly understands that there is a problem within the Tang clan, and clearly knows that the proof is right in Wenshui City?"

"Do you think that I care about these things? Your Holiness, you are still too young. You have no idea of all the dark and sinister things we elders have experienced. If I don't want to believe it, I won't believe it. If you want to change my mind, you must pay the appropriate price."

The Tang Old Master glanced at the old umbrella leaning by the door and said, "Just making me reminisce is far from enough."

Chen Changsheng thought for a while, then said, "I hope that Sir will continue to think about it."

The Tang Old Master replied, "I have already made my decision."

Chen Changsheng answered, "Sir does not need to rush. I can wait."

The Tang Old Master said, "I don't like outsiders in my home."

Chen Changsheng replied, "I can wait outside the old estate."

The Tang Old Master said, "As you please."

Chen Changsheng rose and left the room. Stepping over the threshold, he took the old umbrella and exited the courtyard.

While he was speaking with the Tang Old Master, the snow had been falling harder and harder. The flagstones were now covered in a thick layer of snow that was rather soft and very comfortable to walk on.

Umbrella unfurled, Chen Changsheng left the old estate under the guidance of the old Guardian.

Linghai Zhiwang and the others were waiting for him.

Chen Changsheng shook his head.

No one appeared surprised, as they had guessed in advance that the Tang Old Master would never agree to such a request.

The Pope's request was logically the best method for directly tearing down the black curtain and finding the instigator of this plot, but...

What if the instigator was the Tang Old Master? Even if it wasn't, Wenshui City was the Tang clan, and the Tang clan was the Tang Old Master. If the Pope wanted to raise the layers of curtains shrouding Wenshui City, was this not essentially raising the Tang Old Master's clothes to see what was inside? The Tang Old Master could never agree.

They were prepared to escort Chen Changsheng back onto the carriage so that they could return to the Daoist church and discuss their next course of action.

Chen Changsheng once more shook his head. He turned to face the Tang clan's old estate and, just like that, began his vigil in the snow.

Countless eyes fell on his body, at first puzzled and confused, rapidly becoming shocked.

Was the Pope really intending to stand in the snow and wait for the Tang Old Master to change his mind?

Chapter 838 – Taking Your Umbrella in the Snow

Archbishop An Lin stepped forward and placed a cloak over Chen Changsheng's shoulders.

Time slowly passed. The snowstorm showed no signs of slackening, and actually intensified, transforming Wenshui City into a vast expanse of white and causing the temperature to rapidly drop.

The layer of snow on the umbrella grew thicker and thicker, but Chen Changsheng's grip on the umbrella remained steady, not trembling in the slightest.

He naturally had no intention of leaving.

The dark papal robe, the white cloak, and the shabby umbrella formed a very pleasing sight.

But as they saw this, the people of both the Orthodoxy and the Tang clan grew more and more concerned.

A tense atmosphere gradually settled around the old estate. Even the hill behind it became somewhat chilling and threatening.

At present, still no one was able to confirm what Chen Changsheng was truly thinking.

Did he want to use his sincerity to move the Tang Old Master? Or did he plan to use his identity as Pope to intimidate the entire Tang clan?

Regardless of which, if he continued to stand in the snow, something would go wrong eventually.

Just when the mood outside the old estate was getting more and more tense, when Linghai Zhiwang's expression was getting gloomier and gloomier, and even the old estate's steward was beginning to pale, a sound suddenly fell in everyone's ears.

This was the pleasant crunching sound of military boots stepping on the soft snow.

An officer walked out of the snowy street.

This officer had a full beard stained with snow, obscuring his real age.

Under the gaze of countless experts, in a flurry of snow, he casually walked over, right up to Chen Changsheng's side.

And then, he stretched out his hand and took Chen Changsheng's umbrella.

.....

.....

Many years ago...

Chen Changsheng stood on the highest point of the Mausoleum of Zhou, holding an umbrella as the wind howled around him, holding up the collapsing sky.

In the next moment, he appeared tens of thousands of li away in the snowy plains of the demon realm. In the distance, he was even able to see the outline of Xuelao City.

At the time, he had still been maintaining his half-kneeling posture while holding up the umbrella.

He heard footsteps, and then an exclamation.

"Oh, there's a sword."

That person had taken the Yellow Paper Umbrella in his hand.

And then he had taken a sword out of the umbrella.

A Demon General had collapsed.

A tear had even been made in that shadow in the sky.

.....

.....

Many years later...

As a snowstorm fell over Wenshui City, Chen Changsheng was once more holding that umbrella.

Footsteps once more came from behind him.

This person said nothing, just straightforwardly took the umbrella from his hands.

At this moment, Chen Changsheng mistakenly believed that that person had returned.

But they had not.

He also knew the person that had come today.

For some reason, when Luo Bu took the umbrella, Chen Changsheng felt much lighter, as if he had shed a great deal of weight.

Luoluo had once told him in the Orthodox Academy that the White Emperor had told her that she would live a blessed and happy life, because when the sky was falling, a tall person would stand and hold it up for her.

He was taller than Luoluo, so whether confronting a demon assassination or at any other time, he was always there to hold up the sky for her.

This had also been the case in the Garden of Zhou.

Only now had someone taller than him appeared.

Only now did someone take the umbrella in his hand.

On the snowy plains, Su Li had taken his umbrella.

Today, it was instead Luo Bu that took his umbrella.

Luo Bu naturally couldn't be compared to Su Li.

But he was born with that sort of demeanor.

Whether it was matter, duty, sword, or umbrella, as long as one

passed it into his hands, one could relax.

Seeing Luo Bu's back, Chen Changsheng understood many things. He was rather shocked, and also rather sad.

He finally understood why Gou Hanshi, Guan Feibai, Zhexiu, and even Tang Thirty-Six would always have that sort of attitude whenever they mentioned this person.

He also understood why this person had suddenly changed his attitude towards him when they were at Sloping Cliff Horse Farm.

Thinking of this, Chen Changsheng felt a rare hint of envy.

He did not envy Luo Bu, but envied people who had known Luo Bu for a long time and also people that could become friends with Luo Bu.

Such people included Gou Hanshi, Guan Feibai, the other disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect, and even Zhexiu and Tang Thirty-Six.

They were schoolmates, or if they had still not met, they still had the chance to become friends in the future.

But it was impossible for him and Luo Bu to ever have this sort of relationship.

.....

.....

Carrying the old umbrella, Luo Bu entered the old estate.

Chen Changsheng remained silent, so the people of the Orthodoxy naturally would not do anything. Strangely, the people of the Tang clan also made no attempt to stop him.

In a flurry of snow, his figure vanished behind the door.

The Tang Old Master looked at him and said, "I didn't expect that you would come."

Luo Bu gave a junior's bow and replied, "Sir knows that I've

always liked joining in on the fun."

The Tang Old Master indifferently noted, "If your father finds out that you appeared, he will probably not be happy."

Luo Bu helplessly said, "I often do things that make Father unhappy. Ah, now that I think about it, I truly am unfilial."

The Tang Old Master's attitude towards him was clearly more casual than his attitude towards Chen Changsheng. He casually said, "If you truly feel yourself to be unfilial, why doesn't he drive you out of the clan? Why is that every time he drinks too much, he always takes the calligraphy that you did when you were little and shows it off to everyone?"

Luo Bu bitterly smiled and said, "Ah, the showing off the father is often the shame of the son."

The Tang Old Master suddenly said, "Since you also feel that your father makes people's heads ache, why don't you just take on my surname?"

Luo Bu felt even more helpless, "It's not like I'm Wang Po. Ah, Sir, please don't tease me."

The Tang Old Master asked, "Don't you think that your surname is very strong?"

Luo Bu laughed and said, "What's so strange about 'Qiushan'? Ah, I think it's rather nice."

.....

.....

The surname 'Qiushan' was unusual, but it was very famous.

Because the famous clan of the south, one of the Four Great Clans, was called the Qiushan clan.

Because the Qiushan clan had an outstanding individual called Qiushan Jun.

He was the personal disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect's Master, had taken on Su Li's legacy, was the head of the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws, and possessed the blood of the true Dragon.

For many years, he had always been the idol in the hearts of countless young maidens, the unquestioned leader of the younger generation of cultivators.

In practically every aspect, he was without flaw, almost perfect.

And then, he vanished for five years.

Only three people knew where he was in those five years.

After that snowfall over the capital's Bridge of Helplessness, he had concealed his name and gone to the north. In the snow-scourged wastelands, he fought with the demons for five years.

Luo Bu was Qiushan Jun.

He was a great general of Sloping Cliff, and also a pine tree of Mount Li.

.....

.....

Earlier, the Tang Old Master had mentioned to Chen Changsheng that in recent years, he had only met five outsiders in the old estate.

In these past few years, the most remarkable individuals of the human world, those with the most potential, just so happened to number five people.

Su Li, Wang Po, Xu Yourong, Chen Changsheng, and the last one was naturally Qiushan Jun.

Moreover, due to the relationships between their clans, other than Wang Po, he was the person who had entered the old estate the most.

"What have you come to do?" the Tang Old Master asked.

Qiushan Jun answered, "Today, I want to collect on the promise Sir made with Martial Granduncle."

Chapter 839 – Ah, Qiushan...

The Tang Old Master calmly gazed at Qiushan Jun. He looked for a very long time, like he was examining a strange stone that seemed devoid of any pleasant features no matter how hard he looked.

Qiushan Jun smiled and said, "Is this request very strange?"

The Tang Old Master replied, "It truly is very strange, because the one standing outside the gate is Chen Changsheng, not Xu Yourong."

Qiushan Jun explained, "Ah, I feel that Chen Changsheng's request is very reasonable."

The Tang Old Master asked, "Why?"

Qiushan Jun grinned and answered, "Ah, it's because your second son poisoned his older brother."

The Tang Old Master said derisively, "What do you know?"

Qiushan Jun replied, "I didn't see it, Junior Sister didn't see it. Ah, but he's Chen Changsheng. Ah, is he not Shang Xingzhou's student? Ah, if I don't believe him, who do I believe?"

The Tang Old Master's eyes were still squinted, their expression like the ancient well in the courtyard: deep, serene, and growing colder and colder due to the snow.

The voice from his lips was also chilling enough to make one's hair stand on end.

"Even if this is true, so what? Emperor Taizong killed off all his brothers, but he still brought peace and prosperity, becoming a wise sovereign famed throughout the ages."

The Tang Old Master expressionlessly said, "Even if my second son poisons me to death, it's all fine as long as the family property remains unharmed."

This reply caused Qiushan Jun's smile to fade as he calmly stared into the Old Master's eyes.

"Ah, but your second son is colluding with the demons."

From the moment Qiushan Jun entered the old estate and began conversing with the Old Master, his tone had been very natural and casual, his attitude like a cute and obedient junior.

Many of his words started with 'Ah'.

Ah, unfilial.

Ah, a shame.

Ah, rather nice.

Ah, reasonable.

The young men and women of the south all had very pleasant accents, full of 'Eh's, 'Oh's, and 'Ah's.

This time, though he still used 'Ah', the feeling he gave was completely different.

The snowstorms of the north were too great, so if one wanted orders to be heard from a distance, one had to yell out so that one's fellow soldiers could hear.

'Runaaaah!'

'Chargeaaaah!'

'Killaaaah!'

'Quickly save meaaaah!'

Qiushan Jun had not spoken these words, but yelled these words.

"Your second son is colluding with demonsaaaah."

His expression was very stern, his will determined. His voice was like steel or iron, resounding and cleaving through the snow so that both his surviving and deceased comrades on the battlefield could hear.

No matter how heavily it snowed today, it was impossible to drown out his voice, so everyone around the old estate heard.

One could presume that in a short time, all of Wenshui City would hear of it, followed soon after by the entire continent.

.....

.....

The old estate was abnormally quiet. All was deathly still, even the falling snow not making a sound.

The Tang Old Master narrowed his eyes and stared at Qiushan Jun in silence. After a very long time, he suddenly asked, "Was it very satisfying?"

Qiushan Jun had already calmed back down. "The feeling wasn't bad."

The Tang Old Master asked, "Did you need to take it to this level?"

Qiushan Jun replied, "Some matters, if not yelled out somehow, might never be heard."

The Tang Old Master asked, "Do you feel that the entire world must believe your words?"

Qiushan Jun replied, "I spent twenty years protecting my good reputation. Now that I think of it, it might have been just so that the world believes me just once."

The Tang Old Master did not speak.

In terms of good reputation, no one could compare to Qiushan Jun.

Many years, many matters, and many people had long since proved this point.

In Mount Li, neither Su Li's nor the Sect Master's words carried as much weight as his.

In the south, not even Wang Po could engender as much trust as Qiushan Jun. After all, Wang Po was still a person of Tianliang County.

Qiushan Jun said, "At the time, Martial Granduncle had no money, so he left this Yellow Paper Umbrella in Wenshui. Later on, after that matter, you promised Martial Granduncle that as long as you saw this umbrella, you would agree to one request of his. Chen Changsheng does not know of this matter, but I do."

The Tang Old Master's gaze fell on the old umbrella in his hand.

"This umbrella is still somewhat different from the one from before."

Yes, it's missing something."

Qiushan Jun unsheathed the sword at his waist.

This sword was as clear as the autumn waters, its extraordinariness immediately obvious.

Seeing this sword, the Tang Old Master's pupils constricted. Even an important personage like him was somewhat astonished.

"He actually didn't take this sword with him?"

"Martial Granduncle left the sword for me and the umbrella for Chen Changsheng. Now, the two of us are here, so he is also here."

Qiushan Jun inserted the sword into the umbrella's handle.

There was no sound. It was like the sword had always been a part of the umbrella.

Seeing the umbrella was like seeing the person.

.....

.....

When Chen Changsheng once more entered the old estate, he realized that Luo Bu had already left, but he did leave the umbrella behind.

Seeing the old umbrella, he fell quiet, thinking, he truly is stronger than Senior Su Li; he didn't take the umbrella with him.

"You want two hours of Wenshui City's time. I will give it to you."

The Tang Old Master impassively added, "But you cannot use the Orthodoxy's people, only my Tang clan's people."

For the sake of the promise he had made that year, he agreed to Chen Changsheng's request, but it was obvious that he could not allow the Orthodoxy's priests to search the estates of the Tang clan's various branches, much less permit the Orthodoxy's cavalry to haphazardly charge about Wenshui City. This was the Tang clan's bottom line.

The problem was, neither Chen Changsheng nor any other important figure of the Orthodoxy understood the specific circumstances of the various branches of the Tang clan. Even if the Tang clan's strength complied with the Tang Old Master's order and obeyed their orders, how could they ensure that the Tang clan's people were truly willing to exert their strength?

Putting it shortly, using the Tang clan's people to investigate matters of the Tang clan was absurd, even laughable.

But the Tang Old Master would not yield any further.

Chen Changsheng replied, "These two hours of Wenshui City's time do not need to be given to me."

The Tang Old Master asked, "Then who do you want to give it to?"

Chen Changsheng said, "I have a friend."

The Tang Old Master squinted his eyes.

Chen Changsheng looked at him and asked, "Sir once gave him twenty years, but now Sir is not even willing to give him two hours?"

.....

.....

The Tang clan's ancestral hall was very old, the same age as the old estate, even older than the capital's Imperial Palace.

Whether it was the new coat of white paint every three years or the repairing of the black roof every seven years, no matter how much the ancestral hall was renovated, it was impossible to completely cover up the ancient and timeworn aura exuded from the seams between the bricks and the tiles of the roof.

Many memorial tablets were displayed in the ancestral hall, and there were many incense sticks on the table. In front of the table was a prayer mat.

This prayer mat was also very old.

Perhaps because of the surrounding environment, the face of the young man sitting on the prayer mat also seemed much more worn.

The beard on his face was of uneven length, appearing very messy. His hair was even messier, and his clothes rather filthy. One could describe his appearance as 'disheveled hair and dirty face'.

His eyes had once been very bright, even threateningly sharp, but now they were lifeless.

His lips were still thin, but his harsh and happy voice had now fallen away into silence.

After being imprisoned half a year ago, he had not spoken once.

In the spacious and quiet ancestral hall, his figure appeared incredibly lonely.

Chapter 840 – The Unspeaking Person in the Ancestral Hall

Whether he was confronting Eunuch Lin in the Orthodox Academy, facing his own master Shang Xingzhou, or in the mountains or some other place, and even the day before yesterday when he met the Tang Second Master in the Daoist church, whenever he encountered those depressing important personages and elders, Chen Changsheng would always think of that friend.

This was the first friend he had made upon coming to the capital, and could also be considered the first friend he had made in his entire life.

In truth, the first meeting between these two friends was rather inexplicable. The Heavenly Dao Academy had been recruiting new students then. When all those examinees, many of them having succeeded at Purification and some of them even reaching Meditation, were waiting in line to be assessed, the Chen Changsheng that still knew nothing of cultivation saw a blue-clothed youth. And then, that youth who was clearly a cultivating genius told him that he was a genius. That youth had gone to the Plum Garden Inn to find Chen Changsheng and had a meal with him. Thus, the two became friends. It was just that simple.

That friend was called Tang Tang.

When he was ranked on the Proclamation of Azure Sky for the first time, he was ranked thirty-sixth, so he changed his name to Tang Thirty-Six.

From then to now, the Proclamation of Azure Sky and the Proclamation of Golden Distinction had been updated many times, his own rank continuously fluctuating, but he never again changed his name. Perhaps it was because that period of youth he most cherished would always live in the name of Tang Thirty-Six.

The reason Chen Changsheng would often think of and miss Tang Thirty-Six, besides the fact that he was his friend, was that Tang Thirty-Six had always played an extremely important role in the Orthodox Academy. The things that Chen Changsheng, Su Moyu, Zhexiu, and Xuanyuan Po weren't good at, Tang Thirty-Six was quite skillful in. The words that they couldn't bring themselves to speak came out very easily from Tang Thirty-Six's mouth. There were things that they were too embarrassed to do, but Tang Thirty-Six had never known the meaning of shame.

To put it another way, it was precisely Tang Thirty-Six's existence that allowed Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy to pass those years in the capital in such a relaxed and pleasant fashion.

Tang Thirty-Six was a person most skilled at bringing happiness to his comrades and suffering to his opponents.

Because he was the incredibly wealthy sole grandson of the Tang clan, and there was nothing that he feared. This was especially the case after he entered the Orthodox Academy, where he no longer had to play the role of an elegant and noble young master. He soared upwards, becoming incomparably arrogant and supremely undisciplined. On the Divine Avenue, he cursed a little girl until she wept, and in Hundred Flowers Lane, he kicked a cripple. There was nothing that he did not dare to do.

He possessed the traits that Chen Changsheng was most lacking in.

It was those things hidden beneath the soaring arrogance and lack of discipline: passion, youthfulness, ego.

In the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, Tang Thirty-Six was forced to return to Wenshui, and now three years had passed.

After living in the old estate for two and a half years, he was imprisoned in the ancestral hall for half a year.

That soaring arrogance and lack of discipline seemed to be no more.

The passion, youthfulness, and ego seemed nowhere to be found.

He was of disheveled face and dirty hair, not caring for his appearance. His clothes were filthy, his eyes wooden, looking not much different from a corpse. No sound came from his mouth, as if he was mute.

The only thing that could be seen on his body was a numb and lifeless aura that symbolized resignation and despair.

Anyone who saw him would probably think he was a beggar or ascetic.

No one would ever associate him with that noble young master standing amidst the flowers while receiving the adoring gazes of countless young maidens of the capital.

Except Chen Changsheng, because he understood his friend more than anyone, and trusted in him more than anyone else.

He was confident that even if the sun were sinking into the abyss, never to rise again, and the world were teetering on the verge of annihilation, Tang Thirty-Six would not hide under his bedsheets and cry. Instead, he would call out all the prostitutes in the capital and conduct a massive orgy. Then, he would bring all those youths that were worthy enough to fight with him, accompanied by an unimaginable amount of treasures and several carriages of blue lobster, and ride the fastest horses to charge towards where the sun was falling, and he would even curse the filthiest profanities at the sky and sing the stupidest of songs.

If Chen Changsheng were able to see into the ancestral hall, he would know that his way of thinking was correct, and also that he had been worrying too much. In the Daoist church, he had said to the Tang Second Master that he was worried that if Tang Thirty-Six did not have a good prayer mat, he might injure his knees from

kneeling too long.

Tang Thirty-Six wasn't even kneeling.

No matter how lonely he seemed, how filthy his appearance, how lifeless his aura, he was not kneeling.

He was not kneeling on the prayer mat, but sitting on it.

And he was sitting with his legs spread.

It was that most inelegant of sitting postures.

His legs were spread apart, aiming his crotch at... the countless memorial tablets in front of him.

Those memorial tablets represented the ancestors of the Tang clan, his ancestors.

'So what?'

'If you want to imprison me, don't hope that I'll still respect you.'

.....

.....

Tang Thirty-Six was naturally still the Tang Thirty-Six of the past.

Yes, after being imprisoned in the ancestral hall, he was cut off from any news of the outside world. Let alone writing letters to Chen Changsheng, he didn't even have anyone to talk with.

According the Tang Old Master's orders, it was forbidden for anyone to speak with him. The only person in the ancestral hall was a mute servant responsible for cleaning the courtyard.

It was also from that day that Tang Thirty-Six stopped speaking.

No one could perform the so-called silent protest better than him.

Not knowing any news of the outside world, not knowing how his father's illness was doing or how his mother was doing, these

were naturally quite worrying matters.

But this had also given Tang Thirty-Six sufficient time to think and cultivate.

Perhaps because the ancestral hall was too quiet with no one to disturb him, or perhaps because his father's illness was worsening and on the brink of no return, he had only needed two days to clearly understand a question that had puzzled him for two years: why the Old Master was doing this.

Just what was the Tang Old Master most renowned for in the centuries that he had managed the clan?

His insight.

Both Su Li and Wang Po had long since proved that the Tang Old Master possessed an excellent eye for talent.

Later on, the Tang Old Master gave the Yellow Paper Umbrella to Chen Changsheng when he was about to enter the Garden of Zhou. This was naturally not because of Chen Changsheng's friendship with Tang Thirty-Six, but because the Tang Old Master regarded Chen Changsheng in the same way he had regarded Su Li and Wang Po, and this gamble would also greatly strengthen the relationship between the Tang clan and the Orthodoxy.

Why did he suddenly change his mind?

Firstly, the Tang Old Master and Shang Xingzhou truly walked the same path, sharing a hidden friendship that spanned centuries.

He had given his tacit approval to Tang Thirty-Six's friendship with Chen Changsheng at the start and secretly helped the Orthodox Academy in large part because Chen Changsheng was Shang Xingzhou's student.

Now that master and disciple had taken separate paths, the Tang Old Master naturally had to consider which side he should support.

In terms of the Tang clan's internal matters, the Tang Old Master

had to resolve the matter of succession.

Shang Xingzhou and the Imperial Court supported the second branch.

Chen Changsheng and the Orthodoxy unquestionably supported the chief branch.

In the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, the Tang Second Master had given an outstanding performance, and Tang Thirty-Six was also well aware that the Old Master far appreciated the callous and unyielding methods of his second uncle over the gentle methods of his own father. Crucially, his father was afflicted with an incurable illness. If the Tang Old Master chose the chief branch, he was choosing Tang Thirty-Six.

A young and vigorous son with formidable methods or a grandson with a great deal of potential but still not fully mature—which would he choose?

If one surveyed history, swept one's glance across the old books, one would know which to choose.

Chapter 841 – I'll Make the Ancestral Hall a Mahjong Den

If he chose Tang Thirty-Six, the Tang clan was almost certain to face an upheaval, and might even splinter. Moreover, there was a greater chance that the Tang Second Master would win out in the end.

Thus, this multiple-choice question became extremely simple.

The Tang Old Master decided to support Shang Xingzhou, so he naturally gave up on Chen Changsheng.

The Tang Old Master had decided to pass the Tang clan on to the second branch, so he naturally had to begin suppressing the chief branch.

If Tang Thirty-Six were just a mediocre person, perhaps the matter would have been simpler.

But he was not, and he also had a friend: the current Pope.

So the Tang Old Master could only imprison him in the ancestral hall.

He might be imprisoned for the rest of his life, until, several decades or several centuries later, he transformed into a white-haired madman.

Of course, the more likely possibility was that once Shang Xingzhou subdued the Orthodoxy and killed Chen Changsheng, Tang Thirty-Six would be granted a bowl of poison.

Yes, poison, a dagger, a white string, a pit—regardless of which method it was, they all ended in death.

In the past, Tang Thirty-Six naturally would not have thought his grandfather would do this.

But he had long since understood that the kindly grandfather had

been a false appearance, an illusion.

The Tang Old Master had placed him on his lap and talked about stories from the past, described the glories of the future. There was nothing that could describe the pampering Tang Thirty-Six received except love.

But this love was not for the boy on his lap. It was for the Tang clan's future.

Now, the Tang Old Master had arranged a new future for the Tang clan, and he also had a new grandson.

So, for the sake of the Tang clan's future, the love he had once given to Tang Thirty-Six was equaled by his present callousness.

From the moment he understood this, Tang Thirty-Six held no hopes that his grandfather would release him.

He did not want to be imprisoned in the ancestral hall for the rest of his life, nor did he want to silently die.

He wanted to leave here, but he never made a single attempt.

Because on the day after he was imprisoned in the ancestral hall, many subordinates loyal to his father attempted to rescue him.

Those people all died. Afterward, many more people of the chief branch died.

He could only be even more silent.

Whether it was the paper strips tied around the rocks thrown over the wall or the secret messages carved on the bottom of the food plates, he could only pretend not to see them.

Gradually, rocks stopped being thrown over the wall, and no more kites could be seen in the sky.

It had also been a long time since the main gate of the ancestral hall opened.

.....

.....

No matter how well it was preserved, a gate that had not been opened for a very long time would inevitably unpleasantly creak when it was opened once more.

The main gate of the ancestral hall opened. A cold winter wind speckled with snow blew in.

Tang Thirty-Six sat on the prayer mat, staring at the memorial tablet at the very top, not turning his head.

The old Guardian from the Tang clan walked up to him and said, "The Old Master has some words for you."

There was no idle chatter about how it had been a long time since they had met, no exchanging of formalities, not even a little preamble.

The old Guardian looked at his back, his face emotionless.

"You must investigate whether the Second Master has poisoned the First Master and whether he is colluding with the demons or not.

"You have two hours. In this period of time, the entire Tang clan is yours."

Tang Thirty-Six did not turn around. He continued to calmly stare at those memorial tablets that looked just like mahjong pieces in the gloom of the ancestral hall.

After some time, he finally spoke.

After half a year of not speaking, his voice was a little hoarse and clumsy.

"That fellow came?"

The old Guardian replied, "Yes."

Tang Thirty-Six still did not turn around as he asked, "What did he and the Old Master talk about?"

After a few moments of silence, the old Guardian recounted Chen Changsheng's conversation with the Tang Old Master in the old estate, not leaving out a single word.

He then added, "You have already wasted twenty minutes."

"This is the Tang clan. If I need to do something, I certainly don't need that much time."

Tang Thirty-Six stretched, causing dust to spurt from his clothes.

This was an incredibly thorough stretch. One could even hear the sound of bones creaking.

Then, he got up from the ground, patted the dust off his butt, and then took a palace armchair from the ancestral hall and seated himself.

He was still covered in dust, his hair still disheveled and his face dirty, but his eyes were no longer indifferent. They were dazzlingly bright, even a little sharp.

And there was none of that lifeless air. His body now seemed to brim with an inexplicable vigor.

At this sight, the old Guardian slightly narrowed his eyes.

"That monster from the Longevity Sect is called Chusu? Quite the arrogant name; I approve."

Tang Thirty-Six stretched out his hand, taking a bowl of tea from the hands of the mute servant. After taking a drink from it, he continued, "But if he's already left Wenshui, where can I catch him?"

The old Guardian seemed to have thought of something, as his expression was rather strange. He said, "From the first day he entered the city, the Old Master has had someone watching him. He can't leave."

"Then what need is there for me to do anything?" Tang Thirty-Six wet his forefinger in the tea and flicked it towards the dense

collection of memorial tablets behind him, then said, "As for the second condition, that's exceedingly simple. There's no need for Great Guardian to trouble yourself. I have means of proving to the Old Master that Second Uncle is working with the demons."

The old Guardian expressionlessly asked, "Then what does Young Master want to do right now?"

"Call Seventh Uncle over, call Sixteenth Uncle over, and also invite Grandpa Jiu of Jia'er Alley over."

Tang Thirty-Six casually commented, "It's been a long time since I've seen these relatives of mine. I truly have somewhat missed them."

The old Guardian did not know why he wanted to see these people or what relation they had to his two tasks.

The people standing outside the ancestral hall also did not know.

But the Tang Old Master had clearly stated that in these two hours, all of Wenshui City was Tang Thirty-Six's to manage.

Let alone just a few people, if he wanted to call the entire clan to the ancestral hall, the order had to be followed through.

Even though the snow today was rather great, no one dared to defy the Tang Old Master's will. In a short time, those three people arrived at the ancestral hall.

Seeing Tang Thirty-Six seated upon the palace armchair, the three felt a complex mixture of emotions and had no idea how they should act in front of him.

The Pope had come to Wenshui City and the gate to the ancestral hall was open. They had even heard that the Old Master had given Tang Thirty-Six absolute authority. Just what did all this mean?

Could the chief branch which had been waning away be about to revive?

"It's nothing, the Old Master just gave me a rare two hours of

fresh air and said that I could do anything I wanted."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at the trio and said, "So I called the three of you over to accompany me in a game of mahjong."

The three were somewhat shocked, glancing at each other and then at the old Guardian.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at the Guardian and said, "Anything is okay, so this naturally includes mahjong, right?"

The old Guardian impassively replied, "Yes."

The mahjong table was quickly prepared.

The emerald-green mahjong pieces carved of jade were neatly lined up, looking very comfortable.

"Such a sight truly gladdens the heart, wouldn't you say, Seventh Uncle?"

Tang Thirty-Six used his finger to caress the back of the mahjong tiles as he sighed, "I wonder what the scenery of the Bamboo Garden is like on this wintry twelfth month."

The three other people at the table, Seventh Uncle included, just looked at the mahjong tiles before them, not responding or reacting.

"Have the people of the Maple Hall go and see. Seal the Bamboo Garden. Don't let one document or person be lost," Tang Thirty-Six said as he gazed at the mahjong tiles.

The old Guardian said nothing. The unobservant individual would fail to notice his slight nod.

Countless subordinates and stewards of the old estate waited outside the ancestral hall, some of them going to carry out this order.

Hearing these words, Seventh Uncle finally could not help but raise his head to glance at Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six did not react. Drawing a mahjong tile, he continued, "Send the Cloud Organization to the Quiet Residence, the River Hall to Hesi. I want the maps of the Quiet Residence and the bills from Hesi."

At this time, the two remaining people at the table finally raised their heads.

Chapter 842 – A Shout Throws the Snowstorm into Chaos

The old Guardian expressionlessly nodded to the people outside the ancestral hall.

The mahjong game in the ancestral hall continued. As Tang Thirty-Six drew tiles and played hands, [calling out 'chi's and 'peng's](#), he also constantly talked.

For every two or three sentences of idle chatter, one sentence was an order, an order for the entire Tang clan.

His orders were incredibly clear and exact, so clear that the stupidest subordinates would know what their mission was, so exact that they even specified which drawer in which desk of which room their objective was.

As his voice echoed through the ancestral hall, the other three people at the table grew more and more solemn, and even the old Guardian narrowed his eyes. Neither the old Guardian, nor the trio at the mahjong table, nor the stewards outside the hall awaiting orders had expected that, after being imprisoned for half a year and cut off by the Old Master from the family business for three years, Tang Thirty-Six still had such a clear understanding of the Tang clan's internal affairs.

Most surprising to the old Guardian was Tang Thirty-Six's deep understanding of the methods with which the Tang Old Master used to manage the Tang clan, even the most secretive of them.

The Cloud Organization, River Hall, and Maple Hall, these organizations that were used to control the Tang clan, could be put aside, but how did he know that the Pine Thirteen Drug Association was one of the old estate's legal courts?

The Guardian glanced towards the three people at the table and suddenly felt that today's matter was somewhat troublesome.

It appeared that Tang Thirty-Six had randomly chosen three elders from the branch families, but the old Guardian knew the deeper meaning behind these choices.

These three people were not the ones the Tang Second Master used to administer the Tang clan, but they secretly played an even more important role: they were used to restrict the methods that the administrators could use.

The Tang Old Master had sent the old Guardian to the ancestral hall to ensure that if the second branch was unable to endure the pressure of these two hours and started to strike back, they could not resort to force to deal with Tang Thirty-Six, but other methods.

Only this way could Tang Thirty-Six do as he pleased.

The Guardian suddenly realized that both he and the Tang Old Master had seemingly underestimated Tang Thirty-Six.

If Tang Thirty-Six was truly allowed to act without bounds, given the understanding of the Tang clan that he currently exhibited, he truly did not need two hours to sweep away all the strength of the second branch.

Even if he was unable to find evidence that the Tang Second Master had poisoned his brother or was colluding with the demons, so what?

"Killing is forbidden. This is the Old Master's order," the old Guardian reminded Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six took up a tile and accurately threw it out, reluctantly shaking his head. "Truly ominous, a coffin."

With a clack, the mahjong tile fell on the glossy black table. [It was an eight-circle tile.](#)

Seventh Uncle squeezed out a smile as he said, "I win."

Tang Thirty-Six was not dejected in the slightest, looking to the

Guardian and asking, "I can't kill, but I can still use torture, right?"

The word 'torture' instantly made the faces of the other people at the table pale.

Seventh Uncle's hand was still in the air, reaching out to take the eight-circle tile. It went stiff at those words, putting him in a very awkward-looking position.

.....

.....

In the snowstorm, Wenshui City was still very quiet. All the merchants and ordinary people had complied with the orders from the clan and stayed in their homes.

At some point, many men dressed in the ministerial uniform of the Tang clan had emerged from the old estate, the drug association, and many other places, making their way through the snowstorm to their respective destinations.

The Bamboo Garden to the Quiet Residence to Hesi, and even the estate of the second branch on the shore of the Wenshui were surrounded. Countless record books were taken out of their chests and drawers while several dozen stewards and managers were driven out into the snow, their hands tied by a thin straw rope while they waited to be either interrogated or released.

The places being investigated were all core properties of the Tang clan and had been under the Tang Second Master's personal management in recent years. As a result, the personnel there had long since been replaced by stewards and managers that were loyal to him. These people all had very high statuses in Wenshui City and had never been treated this way before, so they naturally began to complain.

The fiercest conflict took place in the second branch's estate along the Wenshui.

Even though they were separated by an intense snowstorm, the

stewards and managers could still see those figures looking over on the opposite shore.

They were probably people from the chief branch.

When they thought about how they were being made into a spectacle, the stewards and managers felt even more angry and ashamed, and began to endlessly berate the investigators.

In normal times, whether it was the people from the Maple Hall or the stewards from the Pine Thirteen Drug Association, which they only today learned was subordinate to the old estate, no one would have dared to treat them with such discourtesy, with at least an explanation being given. But today, it was like they had all changed faces as they went seemingly unrecognized.

If one traveled in a straight line two li out from those studies being searched, one would find an even more secluded study in the depths of the estate.

The study's windows were fitted with the most transparent colored glass. Even though the winter sun was obscured behind the clouds of snow, the room was still amply lit, without the slightest hint of gloom.

The Tang Second Master stood by the window, gazing at the snowflakes, his mouth slowly opening into that noiseless laugh of his.

The recent chaos had caused all of Wenshui City to feel tension and unease, not just the people of the second branch, but he was very calm. Due to the fact that he had administered the Tang clan for three years, he knew of many matters, including the two conversations in the old estate, and also the specific contents of the agreement that his father had reached with Chen Changsheng.

Poisoning? As long as Chusu could not be caught, there was no evidence, and all that was left of the Longevity Sect's foundational resources accumulated over tens of thousands of years was that

monster that had flowed out of the Yellow Springs. How could it be so easy to catch? He knew that his father had just been forced by Chen Changsheng and the Orthodoxy to take a position.

On the contrary, the true vexing issue was the shout that had pierced through the snowstorm.

I am colluding with demons? The Tang Second Master's silent laugh gradually chilled as he thought, this truly is the greatest humiliation, yet also filthy water that is difficult to wash away. Unexpectedly, the Mount Li Sword Sect has also involved themselves. That shout of Qiushan Jun's was truly ruthless.

"You've really raised quite an excellent son," he said as he looked out at the snow.

There had been someone else in the study the entire time.

The Qiushan clan head had silently arrived in Wenshui City several days ago and had been staying in the estate of the Tang clan's second branch the entire time.

"Able to force back someone like Second Master to this extent, my son is naturally excellent."

He looked at the Tang Second Master's back, making no effort to conceal the delighted smile on his face, completely without shame or apology.

The Tang Second Master did not turn around, but his voice became much colder. "Since it's your own clan's matter, it's best for you to take care of it."

The Qiushan clan head stood up and faintly smiled. "My Qiushan clan is different from your Tang clan. Although I'm the clan head, the words of that son of mine carry more force than my own. Alas, I originally wanted to help him, but it seems like I have once more added to his troubles. I should quickly leave."

After saying this, he unexpectedly really did leave.

As he gazed at the clear trail of footsteps in the snow, the Tang Second Master slowly narrowed his eyes.

He was keenly aware that with the Qiushan clan head's departure, the alliance of the Four Great Clans had come to an end.

Truly an old fox.

He wasn't afraid of old foxes. Ever since he was small, he had interacted with all sorts of old foxes.

The problem was that this was the first time he had encountered as shameless an old fox as the Qiushan clan head.

A steward hurriedly entered the study and reported the current situation in front of the estate. After hesitating for a few moments, he asked, "Shouldn't we hide the important things?"

The Tang Second Master said, "It appears that my nephew did not waste these three years. He's already grasped so many things. This being the case, how can we hide it? For the time being, let them continue messing around. In the end, it will be nothing but a farce."

The steward was at first shocked, and then deeply confused.

In the view of him and many other people in the Tang clan, even if this investigation led by Tang Thirty-Six ultimately failed to turn up any evidence, the investigation itself was already an indication of several important problems.

The Tang Old Master's trust in the Second Master was already wavering. And it was also very clear that even though the Second Master had managed the Tang clan for three years, already appearing to be the master of the Tang clan on the surface, in reality, with only a few words from the Old Master and a few people from the old estate, Wenshui City and the entire Tang clan would become the Old Master's once more.

The Tang Second Master knew what this steward was thinking, knew what everyone was thinking.

But he did not explain, nor could he bother to explain.

He only calmly looked out the window at the snowstorm, silently laughing.

His laughing face held an indescribable derision.

In the game of mahjong, one attempts to form a winning hand from tiles that one has drawn and from tiles that other players discard. When taking a tile that another player discards, called 'stealing', the player must announce the hand that they are forming by stealing the tile. A 'chi', '吃', which means 'eat', means that the player is completing a set of consecutive numbered tiles in the same suit. A 'peng', '碰', which means 'bump', means that the player is completing a three of a kind.

The eight-circle tile is eight circles arranged in 2x4, which I suppose looks like a coffin.

Chapter 843 – A Tong Cottage Set Ablaze

The activity in the ancestral hall and the events currently taking place in the houses and stores of Wenshui City were being reported, one by one, to the old estate.

The person responsible for giving the reports was that steward of the old estate. He spoke very quickly, but also very clearly, ensuring that everyone in the room could understand.

Besides the Tang Old Master and Chen Changsheng, Zhexiu and Nanke were also in the room. They were also telling stories, having just finished retelling the stories of the snowy mountain range and the stone mountain.

"The three people that were first called over by him to the ancestral hall don't seem like much on the surface, but in truth, they are actually my second son's important arms."

The Tang Old Master spoke to Chen Changsheng like he was a storyteller. "I didn't expect that though my grandson has been locked up for three years, there are still people sending him information, and his eyes are quite vicious. His methods are also quite straightforward. First, he covers up my second son's eyes, mouth, and nose, and then surprises him with the force of a thunderclap. However, it's still too conventional."

Chen Changsheng didn't know what to say. He didn't have much understanding of such matters, much less any skill.

In a short while, the steward once more stood outside the room and described what had happened in the ancestral hall.

"What did you say he's doing? Playing mahjong in the ancestral hall?"

The Tang Old Master slightly narrowed his eyes, and it was hard to tell whether he was happy or angry.

After a few moments, he suddenly smiled at Chen Changsheng.

"Does Your Holiness the Pope have any interest in playing a few rounds with me?"

Chen Changsheng had no interest in playing mahjong. He didn't even know how to play.

Fortunately, however, as someone who had become well-versed in the Daoist Canon as a child and developed his sword heart very quickly, he only needed a short amount of time to learn, and certainly not two hours.

Four people were needed to play mahjong, so Nanke and Zhexiu also sat down.

Zhexiu also needed to learn first, and although Nanke had played mahjong with a few of her older sisters in Xuelao City, she was no expert.

It could only be expected that this mahjong game moved very slowly.

As they were shuffling and stacking the tiles, news from the ancestral hall and Wenshui City was continuously being sent into the old estate, to the mahjong table.

"Young Master had the Maple Hall go to the Bamboo Garden."

"The Cloud Organization went to the Quiet Residence. Apparently, they found several maps."

"The River Hall went to Hesi, but they were never able to find the account books Young Master requested. The snow behind the building showed signs of being scorched."

There were two mahjong tables in the snowbound Wenshui City.

One was in the ancestral hall and the other was in the old estate.

In reality, today's mahjong game was being played by just two people.

Tang Thirty-Six and that person who had no mahjong table, the Tang Second Master.

As more and more information was reported, the Tang Old Master played slower and slower, the expression on his face turning more and more complex.

There was gratification, regret, wariness, unease, and also a high undetectable resolve.

At some point, an emaciated elder dressed in a gray robe had silently appeared outside the room.

This thin elder had a gentle expression, looking like a retired official aloof from the world.

But Zhexiu and Nanke both felt an intense danger. Even though the Tang Old Master was sitting near him, Zhexiu still readied himself to transform.

Linghai Zhiwang and An Lin also paid no regard to the objections of the Tang clan and forced their way into the small courtyard outside the room.

Because they had also sensed this extreme danger.

Despite all these experts, no one knew when this emaciated elder had appeared or how he had managed to silently enter the old estate.

Linghai Zhiwang saw the profile of the withered elder and felt it rather familiar. He felt like he had seen it before, but could not remember where.

Even the Tang Old Master was surprised at this elder's appearance.

"With such heavy snow, why did you come? Is your rheumatism okay?"

The elder shook his head to indicate that everything was fine, but said nothing. Either he could not speak, or he treasured his words as much as gold.

The old estate's steward gave the thin elder an uneasy glance.

Wiping cold sweat off his brow, he said in a trembling voice, "Young Master wants to use the Torture Hall."

Hearing this, the Tang Old Master fell quiet, drawing back the tile that he was prepared to discard.

"Let him use it. It's just two hours. As long as he doesn't burn the ancestral hall down, he can do as he pleases."

The steward's body shivered. It was evident that he had not expected the Tang Old Master to agree to Tang Thirty-Six's request.

Chen Changsheng glanced out the door at Linghai Zhiwang, wanting to know what the Torture Hall was. Linghai Zhiwang gave an imperceptible shake of his head, indicating that the Li Palace had no information on this place.

The elder bowed to the Tang Old Master, nodded to Chen Changsheng, and then left the old estate. He had not spoken a single word.

The mahjong game in the ancestral hall was probably continuing, and the mahjong game in the old estate began once more. Just when the Tang Old Master won the first round, the steward returned.

His forehead was now covered in even more sweat, his voice trembling even more.

"Young Master... wants to use Fivekind Man."

The old estate suddenly became abnormally quiet.

The Tang Old Master's complexion slightly changed. He slapped a tile to the table and roared, "Does he really plan to tear down the ancestral hall!"

It had been many years since the steward had last seen the Old Master so furious.

As for Chen Changsheng and the rest, they had never seen such a

thing before. Besides their shock, they were also very curious. The name 'Fivekind Man' was very strange; just what was it?

The Tang Old Master's rage gradually subsided. With a serene expression, he said, "Let him use it."

After another short interval, the steward returned, his clothes now completely drenched in sweat.

"The Tong Cottage... the Tong Cottage has been completely burned down. Young Master ordered Fatty Son-in-Law to personally set the flame."

"The Tong Cottage is my second son's most beloved study. Inside are many paintings that he used his private money to buy."

The Tang Old Master explained to Chen Changsheng.

Strangely, though Tang Thirty-Six had dispatched someone to set the Tang Second Master's study ablaze, the Tang Old Master's reaction was very calm.

It was obvious that in his view, Tang Thirty-Six's act which could possibly incite conflict and ignite the second branch's rage was far less important than the Torture Hall and Fivekind Man.

Another piece of information was sent to the ancestral hall.

This news was somewhat insignificant, just a trifling matter.

The steward said, "Young Master says that his stomach isn't too comfortable, so he sent someone to Chicken Crow Nunnery outside the city to bring back a vegetarian meal."

The Tang Old Master's fingers began to tremble. He seemed to think of something, falling into a long silence.

Ultimately, he pushed over the tiles in front of him and said to Chen Changsheng, "Let's stop playing."

The mahjong game in the old estate came to an end, but no one knew when the game in the ancestral hall would end.

Chen Changsheng suddenly understood something.

It was not Tang Thirty-Six and the Tang Second Master that were playing a mahjong game, but Tang Thirty-Six and the Tang Old Master.

Everything that had happened was Tang Thirty-Six showing that he knew all the tiles in the Tang Old Master's hand, and that he could use these tiles very well.

Like the Torture Hall and Fivekind Man.

But what was going on with the vegetarian meal from Chicken Crow Nunnery?

Chapter 844 – Torture Chamber

In the southwest corner of Wenshui City stood twelve massive granaries. It was said that they stored enough grain to feed six counties of the Great Zhou for one year. If Wenshui City were besieged, this grain was enough to sustain the soldiers and citizens for several centuries, so one could imagine just how much grain was being stored inside these granaries.

One of the most important things granaries had to pay attention to was preventing fire, so these granaries were all located near the Wenshui.

Although it was midwinter, one still felt like they could hear the sound of flowing water while standing in the granary.

In reality, this was not the flowing of water, but the flowing of blood.

In the innermost granary, not a single grain could be found. This vast, and even imposing, granary was practically empty, with only several dozen people within.

Seven of them were completely naked, hanging from the chains used to transport grain. Blood constantly dripped from their bodies and smashed into the ground.

They had already been subjected to all sorts of tortures and were now in the most miserable of states. Even the pig butchered at the start of the year was more fortunate than them.

The torturers were all very young, some of them still in their teens. They all had focused expressions, the sight before their eyes unable to tear away the smallest sliver of their attention. There was no sympathy or pity on their faces, only the occasional shyness.

These young people were members of the Tang clan's Torture Hall, and all shared the same teacher: the emaciated elder sitting

on the chair.

It was precisely that elder that had appeared in the old estate not too long ago.

The seven prisoners were brought down. There was not a single whole piece of flesh on their bodies, and they had lost a great deal of blood, but they were still alive.

The problem was that they now wished that they had never been born.

"Draw a signature, and then I will send all of you on your way."

The thin elder finally spoke, his voice as gentle as his expression, sounding particularly ordinary and commonplace.

But to the seven blood-drenched prisoners on the ground, the elder's voice was like the howl of a fiend from the abyss, but also the blooming of a flower in the Divine Kingdom above the sea of stars.

Though already on their last breaths, they began to crawl for all they were worth, fearing that they would fall behind. Dragging trails of blood through the floor of the granary, they crawled up to the elder, used their blurry eyesight to find the brush and paper, and then made their signatures as quickly as possible. Finally, they incessantly wept, "Grandpa Wei, just quickly kill me..."

.....

.....

A plume of black smoke rose from the estate, followed by a flickering flame, and then cursing.

The Tang Second Master's most beloved Tong Cottage had been burned into the scorched earth by Fatty Son-in-Law.

The estate was on the shores of the Wenshui, located right behind the willow trees, but the Tong Cottage was located in a rather deep part of the estate, so this fire would not affect the life

in the river waters.

The snowflakes fell on the water, instantly vanishing. The fish slowly swam about the water grass at the bottom of the river.

This was the southern part of the city, where the Tang clan's chief branch and second branch were separated only by a river. It was a most lofty and expensive area.

This place was far away from the Daoist church and the long street. There was no inn here, no restaurant.

So there were naturally no pedestrians, no spectating crowd.

Even the subordinates and servants of the chief branch had already been caught and brought back on the orders of Madam Tang.

But in the next moment, the desolate shore of the Wenshui suddenly became much livelier.

Seven peddlers, six government laborers, three fortune-tellers, two sesame-seed-candy-selling elders, and one cosmetic-buying girl suddenly appeared.

Everyone knew that these were no ordinary people.

Government laborers could be supervising peddlers, fortune tellers could chat a few words with elders selling sesame-seed candy, but the peddlers weren't selling cosmetic powder, so who was the girl going to buy it from?

They just so happened to be five different kinds of people.

This was the Fivekind Man that Tang Thirty-Six had requested to use from the Tang Old Master.

No one knew that the most frightening aspect of the Tang clan was not those private soldiers, not the old Guardian half a step into the Divine now standing in the ancestral hall, and not even the Torture Hall.

It was these people that no one knew about.

The Tang Old Master's thunderous rage upon hearing Tang Thirty-Six's request was the natural response to having one's true secrets and killing moves being found out by another person.

Although the other party was his own grandson, he still found it somewhat difficult to accept.

From this reaction, one could imagine the importance these people had to the Tang clan.

From the moment Chen Changsheng entered Wenshui City's Daoist church, these peddlers, government laborers, and the rest of Fivekind Man had appeared on the opposite shore.

They were there to watch the Orthodoxy's experts, ready to act at any moment. At the same time, they were also watching that clump of water grass in the depths of the river.

Just as that old Guardian had said to Tang Thirty-Six, the monster called Chusu seemed to move very mysteriously, but he had always been within the grasp of the Tang clan's old estate.

Today, these peddlers, government laborers, and fortune-tellers had come, in accordance with Tang Thirty-Six's orders, to force Chusu out, and then capture or kill him.

Although the Longevity Sect was already withering away, tens of thousands of years of foundational resources was like a tall mountain. If one looked down from it, one would see a seemingly bottomless abyss.

Chusu was the most horrifying product of this abyss. With just these peddlers and government laborers of ordinary Qi, was there a chance of winning?

The seven peddlers set down the boxes they used to hold their products. They took from inside little rattle-like toys, needles used for spinning sugar, and dragonflies made of bamboo, and began to assemble them together.

Their expressions were very calm, even somewhat wooden, but

their movements were practiced, concise, and fast.

In a short time, the needles, rattles, and bamboo dragonflies had been combined.

This was a model, hundreds of times smaller than the original. The buildings and corridors atop it seemed almost real, as if some supreme artisan had carved this scenery out on a walnut.

The peddlers placed their hands on the edge of the model, and seven strands of different yet innately harmonious Qis poured inside.

Two fortune-tellers stepped forward. They stared at the tiny houses and corridors, the long streamers in their hands fluttering in the wind.

After some time, though the wind and snow remained unchanged, the streamers went still. Perhaps it was because their minds had calmed, or perhaps because their calculations had finished.

A bead of blood slowly emerged from a certain point in the model.

It was Chusu's current position.

.....

.....

Chusu was in a remote corner of the estate.

This place was a garden, where he had ensconced himself in the deepest part of an artificial hill. Even though it was winter, the cave was still a little moist.

This made him feel very comfortable.

He knew that Chen Changsheng had gone to the Tang clan's old estate today, and he even knew that the disciple from the Mount Li Sword Sect had remained in the Daoist church. In the past, he would definitely have infiltrated the Daoist church and killed that

disciple, but he did not do it today, because he suspected this to be the Orthodoxy's trap.

He crouched at the mouth of the cave located in the depths of the artificial hill. He was surrounded by moss-covered stones, seeming to become one with them.

Seeing the nearby black smoke and feeling the heat, his eyes showed irritation and callousness.

Chusu did not know what had happened in the Tang clan's old estate, but he did know that something was wrong in the Tang clan's second branch. However, he was not worried. Even if Chen Changsheng really did manage to persuade the Tang Old Master, Chusu did not believe that anyone could catch him. Both his speed and ability to travel underground imbued him with this incredible confidence. If some expert really did find him, he would just leave.

Suddenly, he sensed a change in the snowstorm.

It wasn't that the snowstorm was suddenly getting faster or changing shape, but the Qi of the world contained within was changing, revealing a murderous intent.

Chapter 845 – Seven Peddlers and Six Government Laborers

Chusu's pupils constricted into the size of green beans, with endless vigilance and fury pouring out of them.

Someone had discovered him.

He didn't know who this person was or how they had managed to confirm his location in such a massive estate, but as a successor to the Yellow Spring Flow, he was extremely sensitive to danger, even surpassing Zhexiu and Nanke in this aspect. He could clearly sense those foreboding omens.

No thought was needed. Like a beast, he acted out of pure instinct, using his earth-traveling technique to depart.

A thump rose from the artificial hill. The moss-covered rocks ruptured and parted.

Chusu had failed to leave. He was still standing at his original position, his head and body covered in bits of stone and earth, a puzzled expression on his face.

What was going on here?

.....

.....

The moment those two-fortune tellers confirmed Chusu's position, the attack had begun.

The seven peddlers all had a string of cash around their wrists.

The strings suddenly snapped. Carrying bits of snow, they fell on the model, striking those tiny towers and buildings that seemed real, just hundreds of times smaller.

At the same, the streamer in the remaining fortune-teller's hand suddenly went straight.

The wind suddenly began to howl, causing the large streamer to fully extend and fly.

It was like a great banner.

The Wenshui suddenly began to froth, even the water grass at the bottommost depths beginning to dance while countless fish fled in all directions.

A shaking emerged from the ground and quickly reached the surface, both shores of the Wenshui beginning to fiercely quake.

Miraculously, the buildings of the estate on the surface were not harmed in the least.

.....

.....

.....

.....

The estate was filled with alarmed cries.

Those people who had earlier been cursing were now running around with heads in hands.

The Tang Second Master stood in front of the scorched earth that was once the Tong Cottage, imagining the beautiful sights once contained within, still not moving in the slightest.

He knew that this shaking meant that the array had activated.

He then turned his head to someplace and muttered to himself, "Even Fivekind has come. Father, just what are you thinking?"

He did not seem concerned about Chusu's life, or even if Chusu might be caught. Why?

.....

.....

The complicated array that had been left by the Tang clan on the

shores of the Wenshui and lain silent for so many years activated. Stream after stream of ancient Qi rose up from the ground and formed layer after layer over the estate.

When he discovered that he could not escape through the ground, Chusu reacted with incredible speed. Transforming into a gray blur, he attempted to get as far from the estate as possible.

He had already pushed his speed to its maximum. Even if Nanke were here, she would only be able to keep up with him, but not overtake him. But it was still impossible for him to exceed the speed at which the great array spread. By the time he had reached the perimeter of the estate several li away, light was already rising to the sky, forming a perfect semicircle with no gaps.

Without even thinking, Chusu rammed into the wall of light, wanting to use his tenacious body and lightning speed to push his way through.

With a buzz, a greenish-yellow smoke erupted from his body.

Chusu yowled in pain. Retreating, he lowered his head to glance over his body. Every part of his body that had touched the array's light was now showing a deep wound with thick liquid flowing out. As it dripped onto the flagstones, it hissed, quickly corroding several small holes into the ground.

He raised his head to the wall of light before him. Knowing that it would be very difficult to charge through, he couldn't help but angrily howl.

Since it was difficult to charge through the array, how could he break it? Naturally, it would be the person controlling the array.

A sudden gust of wind scattered the greenish-yellow smoke, dispersing it into the surroundings and significantly diluting it.

But those flowers that were still blooming in midwinter wilted upon meeting it, instantly poisoned to death.

Chusu had vanished.

After a few moments, he had arrived on the other side of the estate.

The side adjacent to the Wenshui.

He saw the peddlers and fortune-tellers on the opposite shore, and a hint of astonishment flashed through his cold and evil eyes.

Those people clearly had very ordinary Qis, so how could they control such a terrifying array, destroying his concealment technique and trapping him in this place?

In this tense moment, he had no more time to ponder these problems. He could only think about how to cross the Wenshui and kill those people.

The array enveloped both shores of the Wenshui while that sealing wall of light was several li away on the other side of the estate.

Logically speaking, he should have been able to easily cross the river and assault those people controlling the array.

But he could clearly see, and even more clearly sense, that the bright pivot of the array, where it was strongest, just so happened to be over the Wenshui.

As the successor of the Yellow Springs Flow, the evil made flesh left over from the Corpse-Beheading of the previous Sect Master of the Longevity Sect, his entire body was poison, his soul foul. If he wanted to cross the river, he had to touch that bright array pivot.

At that time, he would have to confront the full-power attack of the array.

No matter how arrogant and cold-blooded he was, he did not dare to match his body up against the Tang clan's great array.

He had to think of another way.

If he were from some other sect, an individual so innately foul and vile as him would have found it impossible to hide from the

bright pivot of the array.

But after he was born, he cultivated in the most traditional and most ancient divine techniques of the Daoist faith, and he just so happened to have this ability.

An ambiguous stream of words, bearing some faint resemblance to a Daoist verse, slowly issued from his lips.

He sat cross-legged in a lotus position, taking on a dignified visage.

His hands, covered in black fur and scales, showed their palms to the stormy skies.

An indescribably divine Qi gradually seeped out from his deformed body, completely shrouding it.

It was like a blazing stream of lava wrapping around a cold, black stone.

Anyone would only see the bright, red surface, glowing with heat. No one would be able to see what lay beneath it.

Chusu vanished into the infinite light over the Wenshui.

Like a snowflake dropping into a plain of snow, a drop of water flowing into the ocean.

The Wenshui basked in endless rays of light. Even though the wind and snow outside were weeping and wailing, the Wenshui seemed to be bathed in the gorgeous warmth of dusk.

But Chusu's disappearance had caused some sort of vague transformation to this scene.

It was a very strange sensation, like a ghost disappearing into the abyss, never to be found again.

Even more frightening was that if Chusu was using these rays of light to conceal his approach as he silently neared the opposite shore, how could those peddlers and fortune-tellers escape his sneak attack?

For some reason, although those peddlers and fortune-tellers clearly saw that bead of blood on the model vanish the same moment Chusu vanished into the light, and knew that he was probably approaching them, they remained indifferent, dull, and completely unconcerned.

Perhaps because one kind of people amongst them were also like ghosts.

If a ghost entered the abyss, they would be incredibly difficult to find, but what if a ghost was the one searching for them?

There were no real ghosts in this world, but to many people, the government office was the Netherworld, and the government laborers were ghosts responsible for snatching away lives.

Six government laborers appeared on the shore, spaced ten-some zhang from each other.

Chains were wrapped around their bodies while their left hands gripped cudgels.

Both the chains and cudgels were very old and had probably been in use for many years. Their surfaces were covered in rust and stank of blood. They seemed both murderous and incredibly sinister.

Though the endless rays of light shone upon their bodies, the sinister Qi on the bodies of the government laborers was impossible to disperse.

Chapter 846 – Five Kinds of Peerless Techniques

Suddenly, the six government laborers unwound the chains from their bodies and cast them towards the light over the river.

The seemingly vacant light suddenly resounded with the clanging of metal, and then a furious roar.

The surprise and shock within this furious roar could be heard loud and clear.

Six chains went taut in the air, beginning to fiercely shudder.

One end of the chains was in the light while the other end was in the hands of the government laborers.

The government laborers silently began to move backwards, at the same time pulling back their chains.

The gray flagstones on the shore continuously cracked underneath their boots.

It seemed like the other end of the chains was tied to some incredibly heavy object.

The rays of light above the river slightly dimmed for a few moments.

A thin, black figure gradually appeared in the air over the river.

The six chains were respectively wrapped around his four limbs, his neck, and the tail that had at some point burst through his pants.

To his surprise, Chusu had been seized out of the light by the government laborers!

.....

.....

An incredibly cold Qi traveled along the chains to assail Chusu's body.

He could clearly sense that although he was a similarly cold existence, the Qi from the chains was different from his innately sinister and poisonous body.

The Qi transmitted through the chains was more austere and officious, their sinister appearance brimming with unconcealed killing intent.

The sinister Qi was not stronger than Chusu's gloomy and foul aura of cold, but it was more tenacious. Chusu found himself momentarily unable to escape these chains.

He knew that he was facing an extremely dangerous situation. If he could not break these chains quickly, the sinister killing intent traveling along the chains would lock down his soul, and the great array on the two shores of the Wenshui would bring down the thunder, exterminating him.

A hiss, cold and ruthless to the extreme, rose up over the river. The six chains juddered as if about to snap.

With a rip, Chusu's black clothes burst apart as two hideous wings made of gray flesh unfurled in the air, swiftly flapping in the snow.

Countless black plumes of smoke, stained with foul and sinister Qi, rose up from the wings.

He flew towards the six government laborers with unimaginable speed.

Black smoke enveloped his body, obscuring his face. Anyone could tell that this black smoke was a most potent poison. A single moment of contact would result in death.

The six government laborers appeared unmoved. Their right hands tightly grasped the chains while their left hands struck at the sky with their cudgels.

There did not seem anything masterly about the way these government laborers wielded their cudgels, but the cudgels seemed to be imbued with some mysterious sensation that was surprisingly similar to the Orthodox Academy's Toppling Mountain Staff.

The Orthodox Academy's Toppling Mountain Staff emphasized law and rules, the academy rules.

Since the cudgel style of the government laborers was related to the Toppling Mountain Staff, they naturally shared this similarity, emphasizing law and rules.

However, the cudgels did not enforce academy rules, but clan laws.

The Tang clan's laws.

The academy rules were like a mountain, as were the clan's laws.

If they wanted to strike someone, they would definitely hit their target.

The cudgels descended like a mountain. Even if one were as fast as lightning, as elusive as smoke, how could one escape?

Boomboomboomboom! After several successive explosions, the snow in front of the shore dispersed and ten-some ripples of white Qi appeared.

These ripples of Qi exploded around Chusu.

The cudgels seemed to suddenly lengthen, accurately thudding against his body.

Black blood spurted from his mouth and his deformed and twisted face was wracked with anger and pain.

He could not avoid these cudgels crashing down like mountains, or else he would lose any hope of finding victory.

The thuds from the cudgels striking his sturdy body were densely packed, and the exceptionally bright pivot of the array was

splattered all over with black blood.

He had managed to endure, penetrating through the layers of cudgel blows to reach the other shore. He was now only several zhang from those six government laborers. By stretching out his hand, he could kill them all!

At this moment, the six government laborers did something completely unexpected. They let go of the chains in their hands, apparently unconcerned that Chusu might escape. They then held their cudgels upright, creating a makeshift fence to protect themselves as they retreated backwards.

The government laborers were retreating? Then who would prevent Chusu from killing the peddlers and fortune-tellers controlling the array?

The foul and toxic black fog traveled with Chusu, swiftly pervading the shore. The grass and fish in the water instantly died upon contact with it.

Just when this black and toxic fog was on the verge of touching those peddlers and fortune-tellers, it was suddenly torn apart.

It was like the deepest darkness had suddenly been torn into two by someone dropping from above.

What tore apart the black fog was two extremely ordinary fists.

There were two elders who sold sesame-seed candy standing on the shore.

The moment Chusu arrived, they had just finished tying a green cloth around their stalls, preventing the candy from being stained by dust, and then they walked out.

They bent their knees, lowered their waists, calmed their minds, clenched their fists, and punched.

It was uninteresting, commonplace. There was none of the grace of a cultivation expert, but something more like a boxing teacher

in some rustic village.

Only true cultivation experts could understand the wondrous traits of these two punches.

'Uninteresting' meant that they had already brought this action down to the bare essentials.

'Commonplace' meant that they had already made this action an everyday routine.

This was what it truly meant to be upright and moderate.

And they were using the most traditional techniques of the Imperial clan!

Boundless light exploded from their fists.

This light was different from the light of the array pivot. There was no divine aura in these rays of light, only heat.

Their fists emanated endless heat, looking just like two blazing suns!

The foul black fog that had followed Chusu was instantly torn into shreds.

Burning hisses could be heard all along the river.

"The Blazing Sun Style! How can there be Imperial clansmen here!"

Chusu's flabbergasted shout erupted from the depths of the black fog.

His face and clothes were already covered in countless tiny holes, looking just like well-distributed sesame seeds on candy.

Countless rivulets of black blood flowed out of these tiny holes, creating an abnormally bloody and horrifying sight.

The astonished cries in the wind transformed into anguished howls of fury, making him sound just like an ancient monster that had been wounded.

With a strange yell, he charged towards the two elders, black blood streaming from him.

This black blood was his true blood, containing a poison many times stronger and more concentrated than the black fog.

Even if his opponents were possibly Imperial clansmen using the most traditional Blazing Sun Style, they could not resist this black blood.

The two elders' expressions became grave. With a swish, they cast off their long gowns and prepared to punch again.

At this moment, a girl walked in front of them.

Both Chusu and the candy-selling elders, at this most critical moment of this dangerous battle, had forgotten that there was also a little girl present.

It was the girl who wanted to buy cosmetic powder.

She had already been buying cosmetic powder in Wenshui City for a very long time. Although she was not able to buy cosmetic powder every time or only stood in front of the cosmetic powder stalls, she had already bought a great deal of powder.

She threw this cosmetic powder into the sky.

Red and white powder, peach and osmanthus, and even the cheapest gardenia flower powder was all present here.

The space above the river instantly became a world of cosmetic powder, countless fragrances mixing together.

No matter how swift Chusu's movement techniques were, he could not possibly avoid this powder that suffocated the world, so how could he avoid the fragrance?

The fragrance assailed him.

Cosmetic powder and fragrance fell on his body.

A shocked expression appeared in his eyes, then was swiftly dyed

red and white by powder.

He even felt like his soul and blood had become fragrant.

He discovered that he had been poisoned!

How was this possible?

Chapter 847 – A Zither-Playing Old Man

The cosmetic powder that the little girl sprinkled was naturally poison.

Chusu was the successor of the Yellow Springs, the remnants of Corpse-Beheading, so his body was pervaded through and through by a cold, foul, and sinister poison. Logically speaking, he should not have feared any poison.

However, this cosmetic powder was not normal poison, but the Tang clan's poison.

If a true elder like Shang Xingzhou were to see this, they would assuredly recall an even more far-off period of history.

How was the Tang clan of the southwest able to calmly pass so many years under the watch of countless experts of the Divine Domain?

Why was every head of the Tang clan so mysterious and terrifying?

Because the Tang clan's greatest expertise and its most frightening technique was poison.

But with the passage of time, few people remembered this fact.

.....

.....

Feeling his meridians rapidly withering, feeling his true blood flowing away, Chusu truly was about to go crazy.

In his eyes, these government laborers, peddlers, and fortune-tellers were all mediocre, in both cultivation and strength.

Normally, he would have even been able to deal with these elders that knew the Blazing Sun Style and the poison-spreading girl. But they worked together so harmoniously that there was no gap, no chance for him to counterattack, trapping him in a very dangerous

situation.

This sort of feeling truly made him abnormally vexed, angry, and anguished.

A shriek burst from his bloodstained lips.

Countless tiny ripples arose on the surface of the river, cutting the poisoned fish and snakes into tiny chunks.

Countless streams of black blood shot into the surroundings, and then were converted by him, using the most traditional divine arts of the Longevity Sect, into a black fog.

The wind blew the black fog into countless wisps. Each wisp of smoke seemed to be alive, transforming into snakes, and then gradually forming faces.

These faces were at first fuzzy, but gradually turned clear, their facial features growing more distinct, their fangs, bones, and claws taking shape. Whether fierce or unfeeling, they were all sinister ghosts.

Countless sinister ghosts formed from the fog of blood charged towards the people on shore, sharp knives in hand.

Six chains clanged and clashed while countless black sparks emerged on the cudgels.

The streamers of the fortune-tellers fluttered in the wind while the hands of the peddlers had already landed on the model.

The two candy-selling elders were prepared to punch again and the little girl already had a fistful of powder ready.

Just when Chusu was prepared to use his most powerful attack, willing to risk his body and soul shattering to slaughter all the people on the shore...

The sound of a zither suddenly rose from the shore.

The sound of this zither was inferior to the tune played by the Demon Lord in the mountains, but it similarly seized the soul.

If Zhu Ye were still alive to hear this zither tune, his first reaction would still be to think of every method possible to escape.

This zither once played on the shore opposite the Daoist church.

The one playing the zither was a blind musician.

At some point, the blind zither player had arrived on the shore.

The blind zither player raised his head, seemingly glancing at Chusu.

There were no black pupils in his eyes, only white, but when they reflected the black blood and sinister ghosts, they appeared a little gray.

Chusu clearly knew that the zither player could not see, but he still felt like both his body and mind had been completely seen through.

Endless fear surged into his heart, almost bringing it to a stop.

He did not dare continue attacking. With all the speed that he could muster, he struggled free of those six chains and jumped into the Wenshui.

.....

.....

The notes of the zither rose in an endless stream, traveling through the snowstorm into the distance.

When the strings of the zither moved, the world responded, the soft snowflakes transforming into the sharpest flying daggers.

The sky over the river resounded with mournful and discordant laments, the miserable shrieks of countless sinister ghosts as they were cut into the finest pieces.

The snowflakes were dyed grayish black as they fell into the river, vanishing from sight.

Just like how Chusu had jumped into the river.

The light shone on the Wenshui, but Chusu's figure could no longer be seen, only a blur over the water.

His speed was too fast, even faster than the time it took for his image to vanish.

The blind zither player looked into the distance, disregarding this. His withered hands continued to pluck the strings, but the tone of the music changed.

The tune he played was 'Yellow River', the song that Qiushan Jun had sung on that dusk.

The notes of the zither seemed like real objects, falling on the river. Water splashed, appearing like golden liquid.

The notes silently cut at the blurred image.

A shrill scream of pain came from nowhere.

A severed tail, stained with black blood, dropped from the sky.

It turned out that Chusu had not been hiding in the river, but had once more concealed himself in the light of the array pivot.

With a clatter of metal, a chain shot into the sky and wrapped around the severed tail.

The girl sprinkled cosmetic powder over the tail, like she was cooking or pickling.

Tightly bound by the chain, the tail still struggled, seemingly alive. Gradually, it grew still, and only then did it truly die.

One of the sesame-seed-candy-selling elders walked over, using the leather paper that was used in wrapping candy to enclose the tail.

After all this was done, everyone looked to the blind zither player.

The government laborers, peddlers, fortune-tellers, candy-selling elders, and cosmetic-buying little girl were the Fivekind Man of the

Tang clan.

But this was not all of them.

They were the Fivekind of the Fivekind Man, but there was still the man to be accounted for.

That man was their teacher, and also their leader.

"Three li to the west."

The seven peddlers were still maintaining the array. As the streamers fluttered in the wind, the fortune-tellers once more ascertained Chusu's position.

The government laborers raised their chains and gripped their cudgels, preparing to continue the pursuit.

The candy-selling elders and cosmetic-buying girl began packing up their things.

Their faces were calm and emotionless.

Since the blind zither player had acted, no matter how skilled Chusu was at concealment, how supremely insidious his attacks, only death awaited him.

The blind zither player did not move.

The government laborers, peddlers, elders, and girl all looked to him.

"Enough."

The blind zither player closed his eyes and continued to strum his zither.

.....

.....

Time does not pass at the same speed for all. So it is for different moods and different people, and so it is for the beginning and end of events.

As one approaches the boundary, time often moves much faster.

The mahjong game in the Tang clan's old estate had already stopped.

The mahjong game in the ancestral hall was now approaching its final moments.

Two hours was almost up.

The three people at the table were clearly growing more and more nervous, their foreheads soaked with more and more sweat.

"Sixteenth Uncle, you and Seventeenth Uncle were twins. You've always been close, and so I think that you must definitely want to avenge him."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at this uncle and said, "But you must understand that he was not killed by the Demon Lord or the Pope. He was killed by Second Uncle."

Hearing this, the Tang Sixteenth Master went through a sudden change in expression. Staring back, he demanded, "Proof."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "Due to the matter of the Cinnabar Pill, a bishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons was expelled from the Li Palace. You should know of this person."

The Tang Sixteenth Master's complexion gradually turned dark. "He accompanied Seventeen to Gaoyang Village."

Tang Thirty-Six glanced at the tile in his hand, then said, "He did not die."

The Tang Sixteenth Master said, "No matter who did it, even if it... was Second Brother, there's no reason for that person to continue living."

Tang Thirty-Six raised his head to glance at him as he stated, "This illustrates a certain principle: suicide always ends up being more difficult than killing another."

The Tang Sixteenth Master suddenly rose as he said, "Give him to

me."

Tang Thirty-Six lowered his head back down and began organizing his tiles. "That depends on whether Sixteenth Uncle is willing to give me what I want."

Chapter 848 – The True Identities of the Two Old Guardians

Grandpa Jiu of Jia'er Alley wiped the sweat off his forehead and said, "Little Tang, have you perhaps made a mistake? An outsider like me is not so bold as to involve myself in the clan's business."

Tang Thirty-Six smiled at him and replied, "I say, Grandpa Jiu, at this point, can't we all speak a little more simply? Ning Shiwei was the son of your wife's sister. After you led him down such a path, do you think your wife will let you go? You should quickly think about how to withdraw."

Before the Tang Seventh Master had a chance to speak, Tang Thirty-Six drew back his smile and said very seriously, "Seventh Aunt has been sleeping with Second Uncle for so many years; didn't you know?"

The Tang Seventh Master at first had a very unsightly expression, but unexpectedly, after a few moments, he calmed back down.

"Of course, I know that you know, but before, not many people besides me knew. Now, if I announce this matter, can you still pretend you don't know?"

Tang Thirty-Six gave him a pitying glance, then said, "How can you resolve this matter now? Helping me get rid of Second Uncle is your only choice."

The old Guardian from the Tang clan had been standing by the mahjong table this entire time.

No matter how intimate the secrets discussed in this conversation over mahjong, his expression did not change in the slightest.

But in the end, when he looked at Tang Thirty-Six once more, there was still a bit more admiration in his eyes.

The three elders that Tang Thirty-Six had called over to the ancestral hall were rather unremarkable presences in the Tang clan. Very few people knew that they were the Tang Second Master's true assistants. Moreover, in this conversation with these elders, not too much thought had gone into his plans, nor were his methods particularly outstanding, but... they were extremely suitable.

He knew these three elders' truest fears, truest cares, and truest personalities.

This sort of understanding was most frightening, and it was also a necessary quality for someone that aspired to be head of the Tang clan.

Two hours was finally up.

Wenshui City left Tang Thirty-Six's hands and returned to the Tang Old Master.

The gate of the ancestral hall was closed once more, and no one knew if a day would come in which it would open again.

Three elders, each with their own emotions and concerns, took their leave, the final game of mahjong left unfinished.

The Tang clan's old Guardian did not leave. He remained standing behind Tang Thirty-Six.

He was waiting for news from the old estate.

This news would decide what he would do.

This had nothing do with right or wrong, only victory or defeat.

Such was the way of merchants.

The winner would feast while the loser would leave.

If Tang Thirty-Six won, he would leave alive.

If he lost, his relationship with Chen Changsheng meant that he probably wouldn't die, but there would never be a day in which he

would leave.

.....

.....

The mahjong game in the Tang clan's old estate had ended earlier, when the Tang Old Master heard that Tang Thirty-Six had sent someone to Chicken Crow Nunnery to order a vegetarian meal.

In truth, even when the two hours came to an end, that vegetarian meal was still in the rear kitchen of Chicken Crow Nunnery, unable to be finished in time.

The snowstorm fell in the small courtyard of the old estate without a sound, not alarming anyone, just like the arrival of the thin elder.

Linghai Zhiwang stared at the elder's face, feeling it more and more familiar.

The emaciated elder entered the room, and several pairs of eyes cast their gazes toward him.

Even Zhexiu felt somewhat nervous, not because of the elder's identity, but of what he was about to say.

Chen Changsheng did not feel nervous, only silently prepared himself. If what happened next was unable to make the Tang Old Master change his mind, he could only use other methods.

He did not want to use this method. Although he had a very powerful helper outside Wenshui City, he did not want things to reach that point.

But no matter what, he would not allow Tang Thirty-Six to continue being imprisoned in the ancestral hall.

The thin elder first bowed to the Tang Old Master, then to Chen Changsheng, just like he had done when he had first appeared at the old estate.

Chen Changsheng did not know the true identity of this elder, but seeing how respectfully the Tang Old Master treated him, he knew that this person's background was assuredly extraordinary, so he seriously returned the greeting.

The Tang Old Master asked, "What was the result?"

The thin elder indifferently replied, "His Holiness the Pope spoke correctly. First Master truly was poisoned, and it was arranged by Second Master. I have already sent someone to the Longevity Sect to demand the antidote."

Hearing this, Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu glanced at each other, finally relaxing somewhat.

The Tang Old Master did not visibly react. After quietly thinking for a few moments, he said, "I've troubled you."

He did not ask the elder for any specifics, like evidence or motivation.

It was like the thin elder could say anything, and he would believe it.

Outside the room, Linghai Zhiwang felt even more curious. Just who was this emaciated elder, just what was the Tang clan's Torture Hall, and why did the Tang Old Master trust him so deeply?

The elder walked out of the old estate.

Seeing his back, Linghai Zhiwang finally realized who he was, and his expression shifted. He asked, "You are Minister Wei?"

An Lin's expression suddenly changed at this question and she cast her gaze towards the elder.

The elder acted like he had not heard, his footsteps not even pausing for the briefest of moments. He swiftly vanished in the snowstorm outside the old estate.

Chen Changsheng did not know who Minister Wei was, but given

Linghai Zhiwang's and An Lin's large reactions, he felt that this must be quite an extraordinary person.

But he did not have the chance to ask, because the moment the thin elder left, another visitor came.

Just like the thin elder, they arrived silently, with neither the two Prefects of the Orthodoxy nor Chen Changsheng's group of three noticing.

The visitor was the blind zither player.

The zither player did not pay any attention to the other people in the room, nor did he bow to Chen Changsheng. He straightforwardly said to the Tang Old Master, "That monster was hidden in Second Master's estate. It truly is descended from the Yellow Springs, and cultivates the techniques of the Longevity Sect. It is not a good thing."

The Tang Old Master thought for a few moments and then said, "It is unreasonable for it to have escaped."

The meaning of these words was very clear. In the Old Master's view, since the blind zither player had acted, the monster should never have been able to escape, no matter how troublesome it was.

After a very long time, the blind zither player finally said, "I found it somewhat unbearable."

The Tang Old Master became rather melancholy at these words. "The events of the past no longer exist, so why remember them?"

The zither player answered, "That was the last wisp of Junior Brother's soul. I cannot help but want it to remain in the world for a little longer."

Chen Changsheng heard this conversation, but it took a while for him to understand its meaning, deeply shocking him.

Based on his judgment and analysis, Chusu was a descendant of the Yellow Springs, and was most likely to have been the result of

the Corpse-Beheading attempted by the previous Sect Master of the Longevity Sect.

This blind zither player had said that it was the last wisp of his junior brother's soul... Didn't that mean that his junior brother was the previous Sect Master of the Longevity Sect?

Did this not mean that the blind zither player was the sect master's senior brother?

Then he had an extremely high status in the Longevity Sect, even being one of the only elders from the previous generation?

Such an individual was actually hiding in the Tang clan, working as a Guardian?

Chapter 849 – In the Name of Convenience

The blind zither player left the room, carrying his zither on his back.

An Lin had also recognized who he was. Her face slightly pale, she slightly gave a junior's bow.

Linghai Zhiwang had still not shaken off the first shock before being shocked once more.

The Longevity Sect was the ancestral hall of the Orthodoxy's southern faction. As archbishops of the Orthodoxy, he and An Lin naturally had a deeper understanding of the Longevity Sect than Chen Changsheng.

They knew that this blind zither player was once a Grand Elder of the Longevity Sect.

When Su Li charged into the Longevity Sect with only his sword, the cold pool overflowed with rivers of blood and countless people died.

The several elders that had managed to survive had only been unremarkable second-generation elders. The first-generation elders that could truly represent the Longevity Sect's power had been almost completely slaughtered. Later investigation revealed that two of their strongest elders had only escaped this tribulation because they had been in secluded cultivation. However, in the end, even they vanished.

Who could have expected that this Grand Elder of the Longevity Sect would come to the Tang clan?

.....

.....

"Minister Wei was the Minister of Justice for the previous government. After being wronged, he now manages the Torture

Hall of my clan," the Tang Old Master explained to Chen Changsheng. "When he was minister, Zhou Tong had just begun to make a name for himself with that case involving the Mutuo clan. Following the Empress's will, he took Minister Wei as his teacher. All the methods that Zhou Tong used later were all learned from him, but the two had different philosophies, and Minister Wei deeply disliked him. Even though Zhou Tong had the Divine Empress's support, he still ended up being dealt with very cruelly by Minister Wei. This persisted until Emperor Xian became blind and the entire court fell under the Empress's control, upon which the situation was reversed."

Chen Changsheng asked, "What happened?"

"Minister Wei can be counted as the first genuine prisoner of Zhou Prison."

The Tang Old Master did go into too much detail, continuing, "I requested Su Li to rescue him from the capital, and Minister Wei has remained in Wenshui City ever since."

After few moments of silence, Chen Changsheng asked, "And the other person?"

The Tang Old Master replied, "When Su Li went to the Longevity Sect, he left behind two lives for my sake."

Chen Changsheng roughly understood.

Those two surviving elders were both in Wenshui City.

One was the blind zither player while the other was the old Guardian currently in the ancestral hall.

"These matters resulted in my owing a favor to Su Li. He had me promise to fulfill one of his requests, and so today, I have returned his favor."

The Tang Old Master glanced at the old umbrella and said, "It was precisely the two hours you requested."

Chen Changsheng recalled that senior who he had not met in a very long time and began to somewhat miss him.

The Tang Old Master finally said, "This favor was brought about by the three of them, and now it is returned by those three. Every sip and every bite seems preordained. It appears that there really is such a thing as destiny."

These words were an explanation for today's events, and also a method for whiling away the time.

The Tang Old Master and Chen Changsheng were waiting for someone.

The most important person.

The Tang Second Master.

.....

.....

The Tang Second Master patted the snow off his shoulder and smiled at the Tang Old Master. "How much did Father win in today's mahjong game?"

His expression was very natural, his voice very calm, the same as when he usually returned to the old estate. He was still that intelligent second son who was very skilled at amusing his father.

But today, it was not just the Tang Old Master in the old estate. There was also Chen Changsheng and other people.

"I truly did have an agreement with the Longevity Sect to kill Chen Changsheng."

The Tang Second Master calmly said, "Scheming to assassinate the Pope sounds like a monstrous crime, but I don't think it to be wrong."

Yes, once this matter was known, there would certainly be punishment, but from the viewpoint of the Tang clan, it was not wrong.

However, what was being discussed today in the snow-covered old estate was not punishment, but right and wrong.

This 'right and wrong' was not the common people's vision of right and wrong, but the vision of the Tang Old Master.

In truth, it was not just the Second Master and the Longevity Sect, but many other factions, including the Qiushan clan, that dearly wished for Chen Changsheng's death. So what?

Outside the room, Linghai Zhiwang and An Lin turned very grave.

Because it was obvious that the Tang Old Master agreed with this view. Attempting to kill Chen Changsheng was not much of a big deal, although it was now rather troublesome to deal with.

Then what of the poisoning of the Tang First Master?

The Tang Old Master similarly did not care.

As he had said to Chen Changsheng before the two hours, to that generation of elders that had been deeply influenced by Emperor Taizong, as long as the Tang Second Master did not lead the Tang clan to ruin, and perhaps was even able to advance its status, then he could kill not only his elder brother, but even his own father.

Chen Changsheng asked, "Then can you explain the matter of the Demon Lord switching places with Chusu and appearing in the Mount Song Army headquarters? And what is your relationship with Xuelao City?"

The room suddenly fell silent. The snowstorm outside seemed to rage even more furiously, vexing the mind.

The Tang Old Master asked, "After making such a ruckus in these two hours, did Little Tang not turn anything up?"

The old estate's steward brought back the reply.

He had a rather uneasy expression, as if surprised at the reply from the ancestral hall.

"Young Master said at the very beginning that if he wanted to prove that Second Master was colluding... with the demons, it would be very simple. Only one sentence would be needed."

"Oh? I'm very curious to hear just what sentence can prove that my son is working with the demons."

The Tang Old Master expressionlessly said.

The steward raised his head to glance at the Old Master. He hesitated for a while, then said, "Young Master said that proof was not necessary, only one's discretion. If Old Master is willing to believe that Second Master is innocent, then he is innocent, but if Old Master is not willing to believe in Second Master, then you naturally know that he is not innocent."

The room became even quieter. Nobody spoke for a very long time.

No one understood his grandfather more than Tang Thirty-Six.

No evidence was needed, and no action was needed on his or Chen Changsheng's part. Everything was in the grasp of the Tang Old Master.

The only person that could make the final decision was him, so what meaning was there in doing anything else?

Tang Second Master quietly smiled, because he also had a deep understanding of his father.

"Then why did he do all these things?" the Tang Old Master asked.

The steward said in a trembling voice, "Young Master said that he couldn't stand the sight of those elders, and that he might as well clean up those dirty things in the other houses that should have been cleaned up. In addition... he wanted to burn Second Master's most beloved Tong Cottage to make his heart ache."

Hearing this and recalling that cottage that was now

irrecoverable scorched earth, the Tang Second Master twitched, no longer able to maintain his smile.

"Should I believe in you?" the Tang Old Master asked his son.

The Tang Second Master calmly replied, "Of course."

The Tang Old Master looked into his eyes and asked, "Then what was going on with the Mount Song Army headquarters?"

The Tang Second Master smiled and replied, "I never made a single agreement with Xuelao City, nor did I meet with anyone. It was just that Black Robe found me through the Longevity Sect. I knew what they wanted to do, and it was convenient for me to facilitate them. Of course, I just thought that they wanted to kill Chen Changsheng. I had no idea that their true goal was the Demon Lord."

Everyone present could hear that he was not lying or attempting to conceal anything.

If everything he said was true, would the crime of colluding with the demons still be able to stand?

Regardless of what other people might think, to the people in the room, it still stood, because...

Zhexiu said, "Convenience is no good."

'You made things convenient for the demons, which makes me feel very inconvenienced.'

The room fell silent once more.

Chapter 850 – Second Master Has Something to Say

"None of you came to Wenshui City to investigate anything, only to show off your strength through this matter, shaking my position in Father's heart. At present, the Li Palace doesn't support me, Holy Maiden Peak doesn't support me, Scholartree Manor doesn't support me, Mount Li doesn't support me, and now even the Qiushan clan doesn't support me. And now you say that I'm colluding with the demons, damaging my reputation. Even if I don't care and no one dares to mention it, Father must consider it."

The Tang Second Master looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "In truth, you are much smarter than the common people and your believers might think, and there's also Qiushan and that nephew of mine. Although you're all still young, your methods truly aren't lacking. I regard myself as shrewd and ruthless, but now it seems that I've truly been beaten by you into a rather sorry state. It will truly be rather problematic for me to resolve the situation confronting me."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Can I understand, did you not just now admit that you were colluding with the demons?"

The Tang Second Master laughed, with all its usual lack of noise. He then restrained his smile and looked at everyone like they were a pack of idiots. "I naturally wouldn't admit that I was colluding with the demons, and even if I did, so what? Do any of you really think that the Demon race can be completely exterminated? In the end, a truce will be called. How can one obtain a long peace? Through trade and communication. I was doing nothing more than doing some work in advance."

Everyone fell quiet at these words, the old estate once more descending into silence.

After some time, Chen Changsheng replied, "Your view truly is

rather reasonable, but in the current circumstances, your conduct was incorrect."

"How was I wrong? Ever since I was little, Father always taught us that the Tang clan is a clan of merchants. Merchants will be merchants, and what they want is to make money."

The Tang Second Master sneered at him, "Is there such a thing as a dirtier money?"

At this moment, a voice spoke.

"At times, a merchant cannot be only merchants."

The speaker was the Tang Old Master.

His gaze fell on the storm raging outside the room, perhaps recalling that blizzard engulfing Luoyang those many years ago.

"Some matters might be correct if you did them several hundred years later, but since you have done them now, you are wrong."

.....

.....

The Tang Old Master's words were the verdict on this matter.

It was clear that the Tang Second Master had not expected for his father to say such a thing.

He calmly gazed at the Tang Old Master. There was no rage, no despair. He just looked.

And then he noiselessly laughed once more, his face still rife with derision and malice. This time, however, there was also some exhaustion and relief.

With the verdict handed down, what would the end be?

What happened next would be an internal matter of the Tang clan. Linghai Zhiwang, Zhexiu, and the others retreated out of the old estate, leaving only father, son, and Chen Changsheng.

The Tang Old Master looked at the Tang Second Master and said,

"When all of you were little, I said many things to you. Some of them you remembered up until today, like those words you said just now, so do you still remember when I said this: whether it's the Tang clan, the Qiushan clan, the Wu clan, or the Mutuo clan, why is it that they have managed to persist for so long, their succession never once interrupted?"

The Tang Second Master looked at the snowstorm outside as he replied, "Because an internal conflict has never once taken place in these clans of ours."

The Tang Old Master did not care that his son had his back towards him. "Correct, clans like ours can disregard the greatest of external storms, but when we begin to rot from within, therein lies danger. Think about those clans of Tianliang County that were like blazing suns at their peak. Now they have all gradually withered away, only the Chen clan left sitting on the imperial throne, but even they were almost exterminated due to internal conflicts. Thus, our four clans have always been wary over this matter and have thought of countless methods to deal with it. I once believed that my method was correct. Before Little Tang inherited the clan, I did not allow any of the other branches to have descendants, severing your desires and severing the chance of any furtive glances being cast in your direction."

The Tang Second Master turned around to face his father, expressionlessly saying, "But did Father ever think that this is very unfair to us?"

"Yes, it truly is unfair, but you no longer have the right to say this." The Tang Old Master was similarly expressionless. "Because I later on changed my mind and planned to pass on the clan to you. You also have a descendant now, so I do not understand why you had to poison your elder brother."

The Tang Second Master remained silent.

The Tang Old Master added, "Of course, the poisoning does not

matter. Just like you said, our Tang clan is a clan of merchants. Is there anything that we wouldn't do for money?"

The Tang Second Master knew that his father had definitely not finished speaking, so he still remained silent.

"But you were in too much of a rush."

The Tang Old Master said with heartfelt sincerity, "Before you did all these things, did you ever ask me a single time? Did you even attempt to probe out my intentions?"

The Tang Second Master found it impossible to keep his silence, because he truly wanted to laugh, and so he smiled and said, "Did I need to?"

Perhaps it was his attitude or that question that ignited his rage, but the Tang Old Master's face suddenly went cold as he harshly rebuked, "What do you think? Is this your Tang clan or my Tang clan? In the future, it will certainly be your Tang clan, but right now, it's still mine! Since it's my Tang clan, what right did you have to conceal so many of your deeds from me!"

The Tang Second Master calmly looked at him, remaining silent for a long time. Finally, he scornfully said, "It truly is the case."

Was he scorning himself or scorning the world?

The Tang Old Master asked, "What did you say?"

"It's useless to speak, because everything you said is false. Father, what you want isn't reason, but respect. You only want to maintain your mystery, hiding away in the old estate every day and playing mahjong. There are naturally these sons and stewards to handle the business for you. If they do well, you'll give them a few words of praise, but if they do poorly, that's a problem. Like a rag, you just throw them away."

The Tang Second Master looked at his father and ruefully said, "That's right, what do you need to worry about except that the Tang clan is your Tang clan?"

The Tang Old Master squinted his eyes and said, "That is because you did something that I could not endure."

"You could not endure?" The Tang Second Master's voice suddenly grew louder. "Did you not just say that as long as the clan was not ruined, it wouldn't be a problem even if I poisoned you!"

The Tang Old Master impassively said, "I can say this, but you can't do it. Do you not even understand this?"

The Tang Second Master coldly replied, "Because it's too ruthless? Doesn't Principal Shang value and support me with the full force of the Imperial Court because I'm like you, so ruthless?"

The Tang Old Master narrowed his eyes even more. After a while, he finally said, "What made me disappointed in you the most today is precisely this statement."

The Tang Second Master's face filled with ridicule, but he did not reply.

The Tang Old Master said, "I have known Shang for several centuries, and both of us truly walked the same path. I know how formidable he is, how mentally formidable he is. What you have said now signifies that you have mentally submitted yourself to him, but the Tang clan can only cooperate with him. If this continues, you will bring the Tang clan to ruin."

Hearing this, the Tang Second Master narrowed his eyes.

"And you? Did you truly think about passing the Tang clan into my hands?"

His voice softened, but it was not all calm, seeming to be packed with many years of resentment. "Yes, you thought of me in these past three years, but your decision was ultimately made because I crippled my older brother with poison, because the grandson that you had placed your hopes on foolishly insisted on standing at Chen Changsheng's side. You were forced to pick me."

The Tang Old Master asked, "If I didn't give this clan to you, who

would I give it to?"

"Give to who?" The Tang Second Master crazily laughed, the extremely rare sound of laughter issuing from his mouth. "Hahahaha... give to who?"

He furiously roared, "Did you really think I didn't know that that man visited the old estate three days ago? Did you tell me of this matter? No! Because you were afraid that I and the Imperial Court would attack him, because this is Wenshui City! Do you still have hopes in him? After so many years, do you still feel that I'm inferior to him? But don't forgot that his surname is Wang, not Tang! Just who is your real son here!"

Chapter 851 – A Sedan Chair Arrives Outside the City

Chen Changsheng had said nothing the entire time, only quietly listened.

Neither father nor son had any intention of concealing anything from him.

Thus, he had heard many secrets, though these were not secrets of the Tang clan, but secrets in the depths of the hearts of father and son.

He was especially shocked at those final words, but this did not mean that he was completely oblivious to this matter.

In truth, the person that the Tang Second Master so loathed and was disconcerted by had appeared at the old estate three days ago at Chen Changsheng's request.

"Since you knew that he has come, what chance do you still have?" the Tang Old Master asked.

The Tang Second Master restored his composure and indifferently said, "He is not willing to change his surname, so he does not have the right to manage my Tang clan's matters."

The Tang Old Master expressionlessly asked, "And if I let him manage them?"

After a pause, the Tang Second Master replied, "I've invited people to delay him outside. He cannot come."

The Tang Old Master asked, "This being the case, what else can you do?"

The Tang Second Master calmly replied, "I can't do much, but I can at least still kill that good nephew of mine."

When he said this, he was far too calm, as if he was describing a

very ordinary task. Consequently, both Chen Changsheng and the Tang Old Master did not react immediately.

"If Little Tang dies, then Father, other than me, you won't have any other choice."

This time, the Tang Old Master and Chen Changsheng clearly heard what he said, and then they both thought of a story in the Daoist Canon.

This story was from far too long ago. There was no proof, making it more like a legend or myth.

It was said that in some ancient era, there was an abnormally powerful empire. One day, when its emperor was inspecting the frontlines, he suddenly fell ill and died. The empress and crown prince, who were both accompanying him, were detained on the wasteland by a sudden torrential rain. Meanwhile, the prince that remained in the capital, supported by his older sister and ministers, forged a posthumous edict and ascended to the throne. The empire fell into chaos.

At that moment, all the world's countries invaded the empire, resulting in an extremely dangerous situation.

After several weeks, the empress and crown prince were brought back to the capital under the protection of a minister carrying out the emperor's last will.

The princess and ministers of the court who supported the new emperor indicated that they were willing to pay a sufficient price in the hopes that both sides could put aside their enmities, unite all their strength, and resist the invasion of external powers. At the time, the new emperor's faction was still powerful, so for the sake of the greater situation, this seemed like the only way out, but the minister who was carrying out the previous emperor's final will did not think this way.

On the early morning of that day, before the assembled court, the

minister beheaded the new emperor.

He then said to the princess and those ministers who had been loyal to the new sovereign, "Now, the empire has only one emperor.

"Do none of you know how to choose a future for the empire? Then I will help all of you by constraining your choices. In this way, none of you will need to feel concerned, anguished, or tormented over the choice.

"Because the only choice is the best choice."

.....

.....

In a certain way, what the Tang Second Master said and what he planned to do were identical to the myth described in the Daoist Canon.

If Tang Thirty-Six died, what other choice would the Tang Old Master have?

Of course, he first had to accomplish what he said.

The Tang Old Master stared into the Tang Second Master's eyes and asked, "Do you think that you have this ability?"

The Tang Second Master recalled the reports he had earlier received, the scene in the granary and Fivekind Man by the shore, and he appeared a little absent-minded.

"Yes, only today did I realize that I never once truly understood my own clan."

He said to his father, "The Tang clan is just like Father, an old well so deep that one can't see the bottom, but I am still a member of the Tang clan. I know very well that there are no arrangements around the ancestral hall. As long as I send my people over, I can assuredly kill him."

He then turned to Chen Changsheng and said, "Of course, I also

have to thank Your Holiness the Pope. With your visit, Wenshui City has been in a state of tension for two days, and today's chaos is even more Your Holiness's handiwork. The more chaotic things are, the more I can take advantage of the chaos to arrange a few things."

Chen Changsheng said nothing, but stood straight up.

The Tang Old Master looked at his son and asked, "You think that you can still mobilize people?"

Today's events had proved that the Tang clan was still the Tang Old Master's Tang clan. Regardless of how many years the Tang Second Master had managed it in secret, a word from the Tang Old Master was enough to make those subordinates who were normally devoted to the Tang Second Master become too afraid to move, or even breathe too loudly.

"If it's the people of the Tang clan, I naturally can't mobilize them."

The Tang Second Master calmly added, "Fortunately, Principal Shang sent me a group of excellent assassins."

Just which faction on the continent possessed the best assassins? In the past, it was the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets.

Now, the majority of the businesses that had belonged to the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets were now part of the Tang clan, but its secret strength was now subordinate to the Imperial Court.

More accurately, this secret and terrifying strength was currently under the management of Luoyang's Monastery of Eternal Spring.

This was naturally a secret, but not one that could be hidden from the Tang Old Master and Chen Changsheng.

So they knew that the Tang Second Master was neither lying nor bluffing.

If the assassins of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had availed

themselves of the chaos to sneak into Wenshui City and were now inside the ancestral hall...

Chen Changsheng walked towards the door.

The Tang Second Master looked at him and said, "It's too late."

Chen Changsheng stopped.

The old estate was wrapped in a deathly stillness.

No one had expected for the Tang Second Master to use such a thunderous move.

Now that they thought about it, his silence and inability were naturally a feint to have the Tang clan's old estate and the Orthodoxy relax their guard.

The Tang Old Master's eyes became abnormally serene. Perhaps it was because he knew that his grandson truly might die this time.

The Tang clan's old Guardian was still in the ancestral hall.

But the Tang Second Master had not even mentioned him.

The Tang Old Master was well aware of what this meant.

The Tang Second Master looked at Chen Changsheng's back and said, "Your Holiness, you might die today as well. Have you mentally prepared yourself?"

If Tang Thirty-Six died, Chen Changsheng would definitely think of a way to kill the Tang Second Master.

The Tang Old Master, without any other choice, could only stand at his son's side.

The Orthodoxy and the Tang clan would go to war.

What would the Tang Old Master do?

The answer was obvious.

.....

.....

Wang Po had stood on Chicken Crow Mountain outside Wenshui City for three days.

[A snowstorm had come, and he was an old friend.](#)

It was not out of timidity that the old friend did not dare enter.

Three days ago, he had entered the city and visited the old estate. He had conversed with the Tang Old Master, but failed to convince him.

He had failed to convince him, so what else could he do? Could he truly wield his blade at him over a disagreement?

The Tang Old Master had viewed this world with a cold gaze for several centuries, even regarded his own sons with a callous attitude. He was the only person to be treated very well by the Old Master, and there was nothing that could be complained about.

No matter what, he could not attack the Tang Old Master. Of course, even if he attacked, he was not necessarily a match for the Tang Old Master.

Even he still did not know how deep the well in the old estate was.

But he stood outside the city so as to support Chen Changsheng, essentially escorting him.

But even now, though he sensed the activity in the old estate and saw the faint restlessness around the ancestral hall, he still did not descend the mountain.

Because two sedan chairs were also on Chicken Crow Mountain.

I suspect that this is a reference to the 1993 song 'An Old Friend Comes in the Snowstorm', '风雪故人来', sung by Julian Cheung. It could also be a reference to the fact that the author has used a variation of 'An old friend comes in the snow' twice now as a chapter title, in chapter 507 and again in chapter 786.

Chapter 852 – Assassination in the Ancestral Hall

A Daoist nun sat in one sedan chair, a horsetail whisk in the crook of her left arm.

This horsetail whisk had clearly been repaired within the last two years, as it looked very new.

The Daoist nun did not appear very old, but she still gave off an old and lifeless aura. Moreover, she also had a strange and detestable temperament.

Wang Po hated her. If not for her husband, he would have cut off one of her arms two years ago.

Of course, other than people like Wang Po, no one dared to show the slightest hatred toward this Daoist nun.

Because this Daoist nun had a ruthless temper, because this Daoist nun was called Wuqiong Bi, one of last generation's Storms of the Eight Directions, an expert of the Divine Domain.

The other sedan chair was empty.

The person who had been sitting here was currently standing at Wang Po's side.

This was a very fat middle-aged man. He was dressed in a yellow gown, his corpulent flesh drooping from his belt, making him seem rather comical.

But in the same way, no one dared to jeer at him.

Because he was the Prince of Xiang, the most powerful prince of the Great Zhou Imperial Court, supported by countless soldiers and ministers.

And not too long ago, he finally broke through that threshold and became the first member of the Chen Imperial clan among

Emperor Xian's descendants to become a true expert of the Divine Domain.

The above matter was only known by a scant few people at present.

Only when he traveled from the capital to Wenshui City, rode a sedan chair to Chicken Crow Mountain, stood at Wang Po's side, and gazed at the beautiful landscape before him did a few more people find out.

Wang Po said, "I'm surprised."

The Prince of Xiang sighed, "I'm also surprised."

.....

.....

The snowstorm engulfed Wenshui City, and it also engulfed the ancestral hall.

The black roof was piled with snow, rendering it a pleasant white. The white walls did not become whiter. On the contrary, the light in the courtyard reflecting off the snow made them seem grayer.

As the snowstorm paused and continued, intensified and eased, the light from the sky continuously changed, dimming and brightening.

In this fluctuation of light, many figures appeared in the storm.

The assassins were dressed in white, with masks over their faces. Like the snowstorm, they also exuded a chill. It was very difficult for anyone to notice them.

The moment they appeared, Tang Thirty-Six noticed them, but this was because they didn't care that he noticed.

Tang Thirty-Six narrowed his eyes.

The cold wind brushed against his face. Though it was unable to

cool him, it did cause his hair, which was oily and filthy from lack of washing, to waft up.

He didn't like this feeling, because the scene was not beautiful enough, nor was the smell very pleasant.

He gazed at the white-clothed assassins in the courtyard of the ancestral hall and scratched his head. "All of you fighting just me? That's too unfair."

The assassins naturally would not reply. They expressionlessly stared at him.

Tang Thirty-Six raised his head to the old Guardian.

He was sitting on the prayer mat while the old Guardian stood at his side. If he wanted to get a clear view of the old Guardian's face, he needed to raise his head very high.

One could say that he was a lot like a duck stretching out its neck to be slaughtered, but one could also say that he was a proud swan.

Yes, no matter how chilling or frightening the Qi of these assassins who had sneaked into the ancestral hall under the cover of the snowstorm, none of them were a match for the old Guardian.

But these assassins clearly did not care, and their gazes were always fixed on Tang Thirty-Six. Thus, there could be only one explanation.

Where did the Tang Second Master's confidence to kill Tang Thirty-Six come from?

The old Guardian that had remained in the ancestral hall was one of his men.

The old Guardian said, "My apologies, Young Master."

Tang Thirty-Six smiled and replied, "Apologize to your mother."

The old Guardian raised his right hand and brought it down on Tang Thirty-Six's head.

The snowstorm suddenly intensified and the candles in the depths of the ancestral hall guttered, the ones at the very front immediately extinguishing. Ten-some memorial tablets dropped from the shelf and shattered on the floor.

Tang Thirty-Six moved.

The prayer mat beneath him scattered into pieces, a clearly toxic smoke rising up from it.

He scrambled across the floor, making his way towards the snow-filled courtyard.

It was obvious that the Tang clan had not laid down any defenses in the ancestral hall, but he had made preparations.

But he had not thought at the time that the person to kill would be a Guardian of the Tang clan.

The toxic smoke in the prayer mat was quite formidable, but could it possibly poison the Guardian?

The old Guardian had been one of the Longevity Sect's first-generation elders. He had enormous reservoirs of true essence, and his cultivation was at the peak of Star Condensation, even already half a step into the Divine.

Let alone the fact that Tang Thirty-Six was only at the initial level of Star Condensation, even if he suddenly exploded with ten times his strength, how could he possibly block such a fierce blow?

And even if he scrambled towards the courtyard, how could he possibly escape the range of the wind stirred by the palm?

The old Guardian's palm descended like a mountain.

The snowstorm outside the ancestral hall seemed to be pulled by some invisible force. The winds stilled and the snow suddenly began to fall at a slower speed.

The old Guardian's palm seemed about to strike Tang Thirty-Six's head.

Suddenly, the snowstorm came back to life, and the snowflakes began to descend once more.

A sword glow flashed in the snowstorm.

This was an extremely bright sword glow, shining upon the courtyard's winter plums, stools, and the eyes of the assassin.

This was also an incredibly gloomy sword glow, all of its Qi restrained. It was like it had been stained with a hundred-some days of fallen leaves and dust, in complete harmony with the ancestral hall.

Several snowflakes falling from the sky were suddenly stained red.

It was the red of blood.

An expression of disbelief appeared in the old Guardian's eyes.

The palm stirred a howling wind.

The sword glow silently moved.

The candles of the ancestral hall were all extinguished.

The dense collection of memorial tablets fell over, one by one.

The beams and walls were covered in palm prints and sword slashes.

With a whoosh, the ancestral hall fell quiet once more.

The old Guardian stood on the stone steps in front of the ancestral hall.

His left palm had been run through by a sword, and had blood dripping from it.

The left side of his chest had also sustained a deep wound from which blood was trickling out.

His right palm was up against his opponent's left palm.

His opponent was a man dressed in the garb of a servant.

This man was very ordinary, devoid of any unique characteristics.

For the past five years, this man had always drooped his shoulders, just like Wang Po waiting outside the city at Chicken Crow Mountain.

But today he could not, because his left arm, from wrist to shoulder, had been completely broken by the old Guardian's palm.

Just who was this person that could fight the Tang clan's old Guardian and end it with both sides suffering grievous wounds!

Even though it was a sneak attack, it was still very difficult to believe.

.....

.....

The old Guardian had a vague recollection of this person. He was the mute servant of the ancestral hall.

He naturally knew now that this person could not possibly be some ordinary mute servant.

Nor was he a Tang clan expert arranged by the Old Master, as he knew all of the Tang clan's secrets.

So just who was this expert who feigned being mute and had swept the courtyard of the Tang clan's ancestral hall for half a year?

Someone who could ambush an expert half a step into the Divine had to be a master assassin, and one of about the same level of cultivation.

Peak Star Condensation? There was only one assassin on the continent with this level of cultivation.

The old Guardian knew the assassin's identity. His pupils constricted as he shouted, "Attack!"

This order was naturally for those white-clothed assassins.

But at this crucial moment, he forgot one very important matter.

The assassins lunged towards Tang Thirty-Six, their sword intents swift, forceful, and frightening. They were many times colder than the snow of midwinter, able to make one shudder in fear.

Countless chilling sword glows appeared in the drifting snowflakes, followed quickly by the sound of sharp edges stabbing into bodies and groans.

The blood spilled onto the snow of the courtyard was especially dazzling.

Several assassins lay collapsed in pools of blood, no longer breathing.

These assassins were all of very high level and were exceptionally alert. Yet they could never have imagined that they would be ambushed by their own companions.

A forceful and frightening sword intent enveloped the courtyard of the Tang clan's ancestral hall.

The mute servant retreated to the courtyard.

The seven white-clothed assassins walked to his side.

Chapter 853 – Group Assault

The assassins caused the old Guardian to feel a hint of regret.

He had already guessed at the identity of the mute servant, so how could he not recall that these assassins were all once part of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, had all been this man's subordinates?

The Guardian took a deep breath and then shouted at the mute servant, "Liu Qing, come fight me!"

Even though he was heavily injured from the ambush, his voice was still thunderous and intimidating to the extreme, proof that he was an expert of the previous generation already half a step into the Divine.

The cold winter winds blew his hair into disarray.

Indeed, the mute servant was Liu Qing, once the head of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets' assassin organization.

With the departure of Su Li and the mysterious assassin, he was the most frightening assassin on the continent.

Only he could successfully ambush such a powerful individual, and even he had paid a very heavy price.

Tang Thirty-Six stood up and asked Liu Qing, "Are you still okay?"

Liu Qing said nothing, only impassively nodded.

"Fight your ass!"

Tang Thirty-Six brushed the snow off his body and said to the blood-covered old Guardian, "Now it's our turn for all of us to fight you."

Saying this, he energetically waved his hand.

Liu Qing and the seven assassins attacked.

At the same time, the gate to the ancestral hall opened and even more people poured inside.

Forceful and frightening sword intent would occasionally leave a mark on the walls of the ancestral hall.

Crossbow bolts and secret weapons hissed through the air.

Blood was everywhere. It seemed like the white walls would need to be painted again.

After some time, all noise died down and the ancestral hall became calm once more.

It was extremely quiet. One could hear the snowflakes striking the ground, the rapid breathing of the people in the courtyard.

The surroundings were splattered in blood. Everyone was injured, and Tang Thirty-Six was no exception. Two of his ribs were broken.

In order to attract the old Guardian's attention, he had not permitted himself to retreat to the back.

The facts proved that his method was effective. Not a single one of the attackers had died.

The old Guardian was dead. His body leaned against the incense table within the ancestral hall, covered in wounds and drained of blood, his end extremely miserable.

His eyes were still open, a faint regret and confusion still visible within them.

.....

.....

The people who had come to assist were all people from the Tang clan's chief branch.

In this half a year, no more rocks were thrown over the wall, no kites flown in the sky, but since the mute servant was Liu Qing,

Tang Thirty-Six had naturally been able to maintain close communications with the chief branch. The residences around the ancestral hall had long since been secretly seized by the chief branch. They were just waiting for their moment to move.

But Tang Thirty-Six had truly not expected that the old Guardian would become Second Uncle's man.

If Liu Qing had not been here, he would have assuredly died.

Tang Thirty-Six had the people of the chief branch retreat out of the ancestral hall, then said to Liu Qing, "My idol, I've troubled you for this half a year."

He had met the legendary assassin for the first time during the Boiling Stone Summit held at Mount Han.

At the time, Liu Qing had wanted Chen Changsheng to become the new leader of his assassin organization. Chen Changsheng naturally did not agree.

Tang Thirty-Six wanted to do it, and wanted to establish a method of communication with Liu Qing.

Chen Changsheng was well aware of his intentions and so refused.

But when Tang Thirty-Six was imprisoned in the ancestral hall, circumstances changed, so Chen Changsheng naturally thought differently.

Thus, Tang Thirty-Six established communications with Liu Qing.

Liu Qing expressionlessly said, "It's just performing services for remuneration."

Tang Thirty-Six suddenly asked, "Have you ever thought about being my Tang clan's Guardian?"

Liu Qing glanced at him and then replied, "We'll discuss it when you become clan head."

In order to protect Tang Thirty-Six for half a year, Liu Qing had pretended to be a mute servant in the ancestral hall, so he naturally couldn't speak.

Whether it was before or behind people, in the front or rear courtyard, or even when sleeping alone in the darkroom, he did not speak a single word.

This was an incredibly difficult feat.

It was also from that day forward that Tang Thirty-Six no longer spoke.

Some people in the Tang clan believed that this was out of despair, while others thought that this was a silent protest.

No one knew that he just wanted some quiet time for self-examination while also accompanying Liu Qing.

Tang Thirty-Six looked to those injured assassins and said, "When I become clan head, I'll support all of you for the rest of your lives."

These assassins had originally belonged to the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and were now subordinates to the Imperial Court. Today, they had followed Liu Qing's orders, which was no different than betrayal. They would assuredly have to confront the Imperial Court's wholehearted pursuit. They were used to living in the darkness, but who would be willing to be a lonely ghost for the rest of their life?

Tang Thirty-Six's words were very straightforward. Although it seemed somewhat distant, it was still a promise.

The assassins nodded at him, used their eyes to seek instruction from Liu Qing, then vanished into the snowstorm.

Liu Qing asked Tang Thirty-Six, "What should be done next?"

Tang Thirty-Six looked at the now-shut gate of the ancestral hall in silence, then said, "Wait."

Liu Qing glanced at him, saying nothing, then left the ancestral hall.

Everyone had dispersed.

The ancestral hall contained only him and a floor littered with corpses.

He walked to the stone steps, pushed the old Guardian's corpse off the incense table, and laid down a new prayer mat.

The snow silently fell in the courtyard.

He sat on the prayer mat, looking at the snow beyond the door, calmly waiting for the final conclusion.

.....

.....

The events of the ancestral hall were very quickly relayed to the old estate.

Chen Changsheng looked at the snow outside, the expression on his face gradually relaxing, just like the winter plums shaking off the thick snow. It was bright and pleasing.

The old estate's steward looked at the Tang Second Master and lowered his head, saying, "Young Master had some words for Second Master."

The Tang Second Master said nothing. He looked at the scattered tiles on the table, seemingly lost in thought.

The Tang Old Master asked, "What wisecracks does this child have to say?"

Hearing this, Chen Changsheng turned around and glanced at the Tang Old Master.

From this form of address, one could clearly tell that the Tang Old Master's attitude towards Tang Thirty-Six had already changed.

No one knew the specific details of the assassination in the ancestral hall, but it had assuredly been gory and cruel.

Everyone, including the Tang Old Master, believed that Tang Thirty-Six would be killed by the Tang Second Master. Although Chen Changsheng knew that Liu Qing was always by Tang Thirty-Six's side, he still felt the situation to be incredibly dangerous.

But the result of the assassination was completely different from what everyone had expected.

The steward said in a soft voice, "Young Master said, 'Assassins are best when raised by yourself. Those given by others aren't yours in the end, and the same goes for one's capabilities.'"

These words were somewhat messy. Which capability was being referred to?

Other people couldn't understand, but the Tang Second Master could.

After learning of the events in the ancestral hall, he was still able to maintain a calm appearance, no matter how inwardly shocked he was.

Now, however, upon hearing Tang Thirty-Six's words, he could no longer keep it up, and his complexion instantly paled.

No matter how excessively intelligent one was, how skilled at scheming, if one's strength was not enough, if one always had to resort to acting through other people, problems would crop up sooner or later.

He recalled the words Wang Po had said to him three years ago on the snowy street, the words Zhexiu had said to him two days ago in the Daoist church, and he couldn't help but feel a little absent-minded. Was I really wrong for all these years?

Minister Wei did not come. The ones who came were the bashful youths from the torture chamber.

The Tang Second Master was brought away.

No one knew where he would be imprisoned, when he would be seen in public again, or whether he might die tonight.

It was just like those words the old Guardian recalled when he was gazing at Tang Thirty-Six in the ancestral hall.

The Tang clan walked the path of merchants. The winner would feast while the loser would be left with nothing. So it goes.

And it was like Tang Thirty-Six's message to the Tang Old Master. Everything was up to his discretion. No evidence was needed, nor was there any need to truly discuss reason.

Chapter 854 – Walking Out of the Ancestral Hall

Chen Changsheng and the people of the Orthodoxy returned to the Daoist church.

The snowstorm did not stop for the entire night.

He also waited for the entire night.

There was no activity from the Tang clan, no sign of any turmoil.

For the past three years, the Tang Second Master had been the de facto administrator of the clan's businesses and internal matters. He had unquestionably been the most important person in this city.

But his disappearance seemed to have no effect on the city.

This once more proved that Wenshui City would forever be the Tang clan's city, and the Tang clan would forever be the Tang Old Master's clan.

What made the Orthodoxy and Chen Changsheng uneasy was that an entire night had passed, but the gate to the ancestral hall remained tightly shut.

Tang Thirty-Six had still not been released.

When the first light of morning struck the Wenshui, the final snowflake also fell, ushering in the end of the snowstorm.

The snowstorm had stopped so suddenly that no one had prepared themselves for it, just like the letter sent from the old estate to the Daoist church.

The streets of the city were piled high with snow. Reflecting the warm glow of the morning sun, they looked just like a burning grassland.

Chen Changsheng and the people from the Orthodoxy once more

visited the old estate. This time, they were treated with much more ceremony than yesterday, the Tang Old Master personally waiting for them in the courtyard.

"I should have gone to the Daoist church to pay my respects to Your Holiness, but I still haven't recovered from a cold, and my rotten body can't endure the trip," the Tang Old Master said to Chen Changsheng.

Both his expression and tone were utterly devoid of sincerity, but no sincerity was needed. Both knew that this was just a show put on for others to see.

Chen Changsheng asked, "How is the illness of the chief branch's master?"

The 'illness' here was naturally referring to the poison.

The Tang Old Master replied, "Someone was already sent yesterday to request a master from the Longevity Sect to treat the illness."

'Treating illness' naturally referred to the fact that the Tang clan had confirmed that the Longevity Sect had the antidote, and with the Tang clan's ability, it naturally had the ability to obtain it.

Hearing this, Chen Changsheng finally relaxed. The poison of the Yellow Springs that covered Chusu's body might not be able to poison him and Nanke, but he and Nanke were not confident that they could eliminate the poison for others.

As they conversed, the pair entered the room. With all other gazes left outside, there was naturally no need for this false courtesy. They began to speak directly.

"Of course, it's best if there's an antidote, but it's fine if there's no antidote. If he dies, he dies."

The Tang Old Master said with an indifferent expression, "My second son also didn't think of this. Even if he managed to kill Little Tang yesterday, I still wouldn't have chosen him."

Because he had many sons, and he could still live a few more decades, even a century. He still had time to raise a qualified successor.

Chen Changsheng did not believe the Tang Old Master's words.

If Tang Thirty-Six had been killed yesterday, the Tang clan would assuredly take on the counterattack of Chen Changsheng and the Orthodoxy. If only to obtain the support of Shang Xingzhou and the Imperial Court, the Tang Old Master would have promoted the Tang Second Master to the position of clan head.

But Chen Changsheng understood why the Tang Old Master had said this.

The Tang Old Master wanted him to know that in a situation like yesterday's, he could refuse to give the Tang clan to the second branch, so today, he could still refuse to give it to the chief branch.

Because the relationship between Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six was too close, the relationship between the chief branch and the Orthodoxy had also always been too excessively close.

The Tang Old Master had ended the Tang Second Master's aspirations to be clan head, but he still chose to stand on the side of Shang Xingzhou and the Imperial Court.

He looked at Chen Changsheng and asked, "Do you perhaps not understand why I continue to firmly support your master?"

Chen Changsheng recalled the dog he had seen on the street yesterday morning. After a few moments of silence, he said, "I can roughly understand, because the two of you walk the same path."

"It's excellent that you used 'walk the same path', because many years ago, when the siege of Luoyang was lifted, I, your master Shang, and also Yin took the same path to return to the capital."

The Tang Old Master gazed at the well in the old courtyard, at the snow piled on its brim.

"In those years, I was traveling around the world, but whenever anyone found out that I was the young master of the Tang clan, whether it was the previous dynasty, the Daoist faith, or those rebellious princes, no one dared to show me the slightest disrespect. I simply had no opportunity to experience the dangers of society. I originally thought that all matters of the world were essentially like that. Even if some people might live more difficult lives, what did that have to do with me? In the end, I was that young noble master who lived a life of luxury and who no one dared to provoke. But who could expect that the demons would besiege Luoyang, and besiege it for three whole months? The countless horrors of those three months... in the end, just who would care that I was the young master of the Tang clan?"

The Tang Old Master slightly squinted his eyes, the wrinkles at the corner of his eyes suffused with some self-ridicule, but even more grief.

The flames of war had engulfed Luoyang for three months. Even the Red Falcons used to send messages had been secretly snatched up by some experts and eaten, and there was no hope of even finding a piece of tree bark to eat. The demons outside the city raped, murdered, and looted, while the scattered and leaderless soldiers within Luoyang went crazy from despair. The demons were eating humans all along the Wei River, and the humans within Luoyang were also eating humans. The waters had been filled with white bones.

Even someone of as hardened will as his did not want to recall more of the scenes from that time.

Of course, he wanted even less to see those scenes appear before his eyes again.

Thus.

"'No chaos'. These are the two words that I have prioritized the most in this life.

"Exterminating the demons is the task in my life that I most want to accomplish.

"The Tang clan is strong enough. It has the right to choose, so which should I choose, between the Orthodoxy and the Imperial Court?

"I choose the strongest side.

"What does it mean to be strong? Other than whose punch is the strongest, one must also see whose punch is the steadiest."

The Tang Old Master looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "Your punch is still not strong enough, and as for steadiness, you are far inferior to your teacher."

Chen Changsheng knew that this was the Tang Old Master's final stance, and he had no objection to it.

"I have nothing else to say. I only want to take him with me. I originally came to Wenshui to pick him up, not to persuade the Tang clan to change its mind."

In the Daoist church, he had said the same to the Tang Second Master.

But the Tang Second Master had not believed him, replying with that scornful and silent laughing face of his.

The Tang Old Master's eyes were far stronger than his son's, so he could naturally see that Chen Changsheng was speaking the truth.

The entire matter had been just this simple. The matters of youths had always been this simple.

The Tang Old Master recalled the amusing events that had taken place countless years ago, when he and Shang and Yin had left Luoyang and started off to the capital. He fell quiet for a very long time.

Countless members of their generation had already died, and

even though he and Shang Xingzhou still lived, they were gradually growing old. However, even they had been young once.

"I agree to your request." The Tang Old Master looked at him and added, "Now that I think about it, he should have already come out by now."

.....

.....

Wenshui City was much livelier today than it had been for the past few days.

The Tang Second Master had been imprisoned in some unknown place, the second branch had fallen from power, and an audit and purge were currently being carried out in tandem. However, the stores along the street were already open, and there were many more pedestrians.

The main street in front of the ancestral hall was even more raucous. The chief branch's stewards, managers, and subordinates accompanied Madam Tang as they waited outside.

Suddenly, the heavy wooden gate of the ancestral hall slowly began to open.

Tang Thirty-Six walked out.

Just like when he walked out of the Mausoleum of Books many years ago, his face was filthy and hair dirty, his body covered in dust and clearly much thinner. It was like he had suffered through some great ordeal.

But his eyes were even brighter, his expression much calmer, his temperament much steadier.

Upon seeing her son, Madam Tang felt her eyes go moist, but she forcefully suppressed her emotions, not daring to weep.

What happened next proved to the crowd that he was still the Tang Thirty-Six of the past.

Regardless of the fact that he had been imprisoned in the ancestral hall for half a year, that his expression and temperament were greatly changed.

He asked the crowd, "What of that useless old man?"

Chapter 855 – It's My Turn to Talk

All of Wenshui City was stunned at the question.

It was completely silent outside the ancestral hall, as still as a graveyard.

After a moment, one person finally woke from their daze.

Madam Tang suppressed the fear in her eyes and swiftly walked up to him, raising her hand to slap him.

Would a resounding slap perhaps alleviate the Old Master's anger once he heard about this matter?

Madam Tang thought this way. Gritting her teeth, she struck. Not wanting her blow to be soft out of regret and thus cause people to find problems with it, she used an incredible amount of strength.

Tang Thirty-Six smiled at her, but did not avoid it.

A slap rang out as Madam Tang's palm landed on Tang Thirty-Six's face.

Tang Thirty-Six's left cheek swiftly reddened, but because he had not washed his face for many days, the layers of filth made it seem far from striking.

But he was still smiling, a sincere smile that was not the least bit forced or emotionless.

Madam Tang froze. Her voice tinged with remorse and reproach, she said, "Why didn't you avoid it?"

"The child has been unfilial. I've concerned Mother for this half a year, and I could not stand by Father's bed. I should be slapped."

Tang Thirty-Six hugged his mother and whispered, "Mother, go home first and wait for me. I still have some things to do."

Finally meeting after half a year, Madam Tang was quite

unwilling. However, she knew that the Pope was at the old estate and what her son needed to do was undoubtedly important, so she could not stop him.

"At least go home to take a bath and eat something. I've already had the kitchen prepare your favorite egg fried rice."

Madam Tang looked at his clearly thinner face and said in heartache.

"Even though I was imprisoned in the ancestral hall for half a year, no one dared to short me any food or drink. Even if I'm hungry, your son has gotten used to the food from the old estate's kitchen."

Tang Thirty-Six looked into his mother's eyes and smiled. "Once I thoroughly finish with my business, everyone will have it much easier."

Saying this, he looked at the crowd on the street.

The chief branch's stewards, managers, and several dozen servant girls were all smiles.

As for those personal maids and grannies that had been at his side for many years, they were already crying tears of happiness.

"What are you crying for? Do you really think that I'm made of water?"

He looked at those maids and said, "Better to quickly arrange a bath for your young master."

This order caused those managers and stewards to recall that sight that would often take place in Wenshui City many years ago.

Could this sight really reappear today? The expressions on their faces became extremely splendid.

The maids gave their assent in unison, and the servants who had become accustomed to this matter took out ten-some expensive rolls of fabric in various colors from the carriage. They also took

out several different types of wooden sticks, and in a short time, using curtains of cloth, they had finished partitioning a space several zhang in radius in front of the ancestral hall.

Those extremely capable servant women brusquely knocked, or perhaps smashed, their way into a neighboring store, removing from the workshop in the rear all the hot water being prepared there. The maids had long since taken out a wooden cask and several washing implements from the carriage and were now hurriedly bringing it all into the curtained area.

Tang Thirty-Six had already walked into the curtains and taken off all his clothes.

Steam billowed, the silhouettes of people could be faintly made out through the curtains, and the sloshing of water could be heard loud and clear.

The young girls of the city blushed and turned around, but they also couldn't help but turn back and sneak a glance from time to time.

Madam Tang somewhat helplessly sighed, but her face had a relieved expression.

Those managers, stewards, and spectating populace were at first speechless from shock, but they all began to laugh.

It truly had been many years since such a sight had been seen in Wenshui City.

In a short while, the curtains were taken down.

The thin and haggard young man of disheveled hair and dirty face was now an elegant and noble princeling.

The eyes of the girls on the street were incomparably bright.

A maid came forward, her hands holding a sword. Carefully, she tied it to his waist.

This sword appeared rather ancient, but when tied to his waist, it

looked like it had just been washed, imbued with a threatening edge.

It was the Wenshui Sword.

.....

.....

Cloud shoes on feet and Wenshui Sword at his waist, Tang Thirty-Six left the ancestral hall and went to the old estate.

The crowd stopped at a distance, not daring to follow him.

He didn't even glance at the wooden tablets left behind by generations of emperors and Popes, paying even less attention to that incredibly humble steward.

He pushed upon the gate of the old estate, entering with all the ease of one returning home.

In truth, this place had always been his home.

He had lived here for many years. In all of Wenshui City, no one other than the Old Master was as familiar with this place as him.

After entering the old estate's courtyard, he began to greet people as the master of the household would.

He patted Linghai Zhiwang on the shoulder and said, "You came."

He then said to Archbishop An Lin, "Are you comfortable here?"

He saw Nanke and froze, then turned around and said to the steward, "What are you standing around for? Quickly take out Grandpa's best tea leaves and brew a pot. Do you know who this person is? Although I've never met her, I can recognize with a glance at her unusually delicate and beautiful face who she is. Do you want to die?"

He looked at Zhexiu and nodded, but said nothing.

Finally, he saw Guan Feibai. His eyebrows instantly shot up like swords as he said, "Why are you also here?"

Chen Changsheng had made Guan Feibai remain in the Daoist church yesterday, concerned that Chusu might attempt an ambush. Now that Chusu had been driven out of Wenshui City, and since Guan Feibai knew that Tang Thirty-Six might be released today, he had come especially to the old estate to wait. He had not expected that though they had not met for several years, this fellow was still as irritating as ever.

"Am I not allowed to come?" Guan Feibai's eyebrows similarly shot up like swords.

Just when he thought Tang Thirty-Six would return the retort like usual, Tang Thirty-Six smiled and said, "A guest from afar; I wholeheartedly welcome you."

He immediately changed the subject, his smile fading as he pulled Zhexiu to his side. "In the future, when we go to Mount Li, you also have to welcome us."

Guan Feibai shook his head and thought, I was even worried that this fellow might have some problems after being imprisoned, but it looks I've truly been worried over nothing.

.....

.....

The thick curtain descended, sealing off the room. All the gazes and the snow piled along the brim of the well were left on the outside.

The tiles on the mahjong table were in disarray. Some were standing, some were toppled over, some were facing the sky, and some were hiding their faces. One could still vaguely tell that these were the remnants from yesterday's game.

Chen Changsheng and the Tang Old Master sat across from each other, separated by the mahjong table.

Tang Thirty-Six walked to the table and looked at Chen Changsheng. "Have you finished talking things over?"

Chen Changsheng nodded.

In ill temper, Tang Thirty-Six retorted, "Then why aren't you getting off the seat?"

"It's your clan's chair; can I stop you from sitting?"

Chen Changsheng helplessly stood and instead sat on a chair at the side.

Tang Thirty-Six sat on the newly vacated chair.

It was precisely the chair facing the Tang Old Master.

This chair naturally had some significance.

There was naturally a deeper meaning in shooing Chen Changsheng from the seat and sitting upon it himself.

"Now it's our turn to talk."

Tang Thirty-Six said to the Tang Old Master.

As he said this, his eyes showed a complex mixture of emotions.

There was childish admiration, grief and sadness, concern and unwillingness, hatred and loneliness.

But when he finished speaking, this complex and indescribable mixture of emotions utterly vanished, leaving behind only apathy.

Chapter 856 – A New Mahjong Game

The Tang Old Master said, "What does a little cub like you have to talk about?"

Tang Thirty-Six grinned and replied, "Old rascal, do you think this mahjong game is over?"

For some reason, Chen Changsheng only felt an icy cold from this smile, and then he felt sad in place of his friend.

The first thing Tang Thirty-Six had said after coming out of the Tang clan's ancestral hall was, "What of that useless old man?"

When comparing 'useless old man' to 'old rascal', it was naturally the former that exhibited more resentment.

But his use of the latter did not mean that his resentment was fading, only that he was growing increasingly indifferent.

Indifference sprang from lack of emotion.

The Tang Old Master was far too emotionless.

On the surface, the events of yesterday had to be attributed to the Tang Old Master's wisdom and resolve.

Upon learning that his second son was working with the demons, he had placed justice before family and punished his son.

But Tang Thirty-Six did not think this way.

In the ancestral hall, he had silently thought for a full half of a year, so he had long since thought over everything until it was crystal-clear.

He had already seen through all that his grandfather was.

If Chen Changsheng had not come to Wenshui, his father would have died and he would have remained under house arrest until his death.

Whether it was the poisoning or the struggle for power, many

things appeared to be the Tang Second Master's doing, but whose Tang clan was this again?

If not for the fact that the Tang Old Master had maintained his silence all this time, how could these things have happened?

And this wasn't even considering that Tang Thirty-Six's imprisonment in the ancestral hall had been on the personal order of the Tang Old Master.

If one wanted to find the principal conspirator of this entire matter, it could only be the Tang Old Master.

But the Tang Old Master had not expected that for his grandson's sake, the Orthodoxy would display such an unyielding stance, willing to resort to indiscriminate destruction. The Chen Changsheng that appeared in Wenshui City was not at all like some mature and composed Pope who prioritized the Orthodoxy and the common people. He was more like some reckless savage whose passion had gone to his head.

The Tang Old Master had also not expected for South Stream Temple and the Mount Li Sword Sect to also take such resolute standpoints, the latter even causing the Qiushan clan to withdraw. He was even more surprised that these youths had pushed the tiles over, allowing many people to see the truth behind this mahjong game.

.....

.....

The jade mahjong tiles were incessantly shuffled, their constant clashing creating a very pleasant sound, and then they gradually began to be tidied up.

Tang Thirty-Six was quite adept at shuffling tiles, not forgetting to make small talk with Chen Changsheng. "Ever since I was small, I've wanted to play mahjong in this room, but this old rascal was always saying that I was still young and never gave me the chance.

In truth, in terms of playing mahjong, he's no match for me."

After learning that Xu Yourong had once played mahjong with the Tang Old Master, Chen Changsheng had been curious as to why Tang Thirty-Six had never met her. Only after hearing this did he learn the story behind it. Back then, Tang Thirty-Six had just been a child in the Tang Old Master's eyes, and so it was only natural that he did not have the right to enter this room.

"You really think that you have the right to play a game of mahjong against me?"

The Tang Old Master had not moved. His right hand stroked a cane while he calmly looked at Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six had no intention to show respect for the elderly. He had only set up his tiles, paying no attention to the remaining tiles scattered over the table.

He said, "The game I played against Second Uncle wasn't bad, right?"

The Tang Old Master replied, "That was because I gave you excellent tiles."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "But the final tile was mine."

Both these statements were correct.

The Torture Hall and Minister Wei, Fivekind Man, and the hidden strengths of the old estate were the best tiles the Tang clan could give.

When these tiles were placed in Tang Thirty-Six's hand, the Tang Second Master could not put up too much of a fight, so he had chosen simply not to fight. Instead, he had placed all his hopes on his final, thunderous blow. But he had not expected that Tang Thirty-Six had also concealed a particularly beautiful hand of tiles.

The Tang Old Master impassively said, "Without my tiles, you would have already lost everything. How could you possibly have

lasted until the final round?"

"Reasonable."

Tang Thirty-Six raised his head and said, "Then today, I won't use the clan's tiles. I'll use my own tiles to fight a round with you."

As he said this, he looked the Old Master straight in the eyes, their eyes level. This was incredibly impolite, and also firm.

The Tang Old Master scornfully said, "What good tiles does a little cub like you have?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "His tiles are my tiles, and who would dare say that those tiles aren't good?"

He then turned to face Chen Changsheng and asked, "Is there a problem with my borrowing them?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "They aren't books. If you want to use them, take them."

"Why feign generosity?" Tang Thirty-Six said derisively. "When I wanted to see that sword of yours, you weren't willing, so nervous like it was some sort of big deal."

He was speaking of that old matter in the Plum Garden Inn.

The two looked at each other and smiled, no longer arguing about anything.

The Tang Old Master did not smile. For the first time, his expression turned grave.

.....

.....

There was only one spectator to this match between the Tang clan's grandfather and grandson, and that was Chen Changsheng.

Although he was not a participant, he was also not purely a spectator. After all, it was his tiles on the table, stacked in front of Tang Thirty-Six.

This mahjong game was not played according to the capital's rules, nor was it the bloody battle to the end popular in Wenshui City, nor the blood flowing out in rivers so beloved by the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect.

The method Tang Thirty-Six chose was one extremely in line with his personality, and it was also one method that a beginner like Chen Changsheng could more easily understand.

Comparing sizes.

The clicking of tiles rang out in the quiet room.

This was the collision of jade tiles against the hard pear wood of the table.

These tiles were being thrown on the table, where they quietly lay, like Dragonhorses lying on a meadow, baring their bellies to the warm sunlight.

With an order, these soldiers and horses would array themselves and charge ceaselessly forward.

The red '中' was a banner dyed red, flapping in the wind: the Orthodoxy cavalry, the Mount Song Army, the Cong Province Army.

The 'two bamboo' tile was a spear, the Painted Armor Xiao Zhang who had been pursued by the Imperial Court for three years but had countered by killing no small number of its experts.

There was also a blade, a dragon, a tiger, and millions upon millions of believers.

[The little chick was a Peacock, and also a Phoenix.](#)

.....

.....

Tang Thirty-Six had flipped over all the tiles in his hand.

Chen Changsheng somewhat uneasily asked, "This sort of

description would make both of them unhappy, wouldn't it?"

Tang Thirty-Six said, "The calamity of this being inferior to that... it's just a description, so why so serious? And besides, are you going to pick out a tile with a Phoenix on it?"

Chen Changsheng had only just familiarized himself with the tiles yesterday, so he certainly couldn't pick one out. He was forced to remain silent.

This was quite amusing, but the Tang Old Master still did not smile. His expression was even graver than earlier.

Tang Thirty-Six had already finished playing out his hand, but the Tang Old Master still had not moved.

The countless mahjong tiles represented the strengths of each side. If one only looked at the strengths represented on the tiles, it was not clear who would gain the final victory.

If the Tang Old Master used his tiles to speak reason to these two juniors, he would assuredly win.

But the Tang clan would assuredly lose.

The red '中', 'two bamboo', and 'little chick' are all mahjong tiles. 'Two bamboo' is a spear because it is two 'sticks' stacked on top of each other lengthwise. I believe 'little chick' refers to the 'one bamboo' tile, which is usually represented by a bird. As for the rest, I can only say that the Tang clan must be using a very unique set of mahjong tiles.

Chapter 857 – The Most Outstanding Prodigal Son

Besides the strength represented on the mahjong table, there was also a great deal of strength hidden beneath the table that would often play the most important role in the most crucial of moments.

For instance, three years ago at the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, if the Tang clan had not acted, Shang Xingzhou truly would have found it very difficult to bring the situation in the capital under control.

"You are a descendant of the Tang clan. You should understand just where the Tang clan is strongest."

The Tang Old Master looked at Tang Thirty-Six and said.

"Is it that toothless, old phrase again?"

Tang Thirty-Six, his face a picture of unconcern, said, "Back in the capital, Second Uncle kept prattling at my ear, saying that I had to learn respect, and the thing most worthy of respect in our Tang clan was history. In other words, it's because our Tang clan is the oldest clan on the continent."

The Tang Old Master said, "It's truly an old and toothless phrase, but the old phrases are often correct."

"I didn't say that this phrase was wrong. Time and history are naturally worthy of respect. One even feels dread just thinking about it."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at the Tang Old Master and said, "The longer you live, the more secrets you know. The Tang clan has existed in this world for countless years, so it must know countless secrets, concealing many hidden moves. I suppose that this is what's called foundational resources?"

The Tang Old Master replied, "It's not that simple, but you can

understand it this way."

Tang Thirty-Six calmly said, "If we take time as the measure, not the Qiushan clan, the Wu clan, the Mutuo clan, or even the Liangs, Chen, Wangs, and Zhus of these past thousand years measure up to the Tang clan. The tiles that I have played are also no match, but you've forgotten one thing."

"What thing?"

"I have a friend."

Tang Thirty-Six patted Chen Changsheng's shoulder, then continued, "History, time, foundational resources... everyone in the Tang clan repeats these words day after day, and I've truly gotten tired of them. Do you really think that no one in the world can contend against you like this? Have all of you forgotten about that place called the Daoist sect?"

The Daoist sect was the Daoist faith and was not any sort of place. At present, it was the Orthodoxy.

The Orthodoxy was not a noble clan, but it was older than all noble clans, including the Tang clan.

The Orthodoxy was not a sect, but it was largest of all sects, including the Longevity Sect.

Who could have existed for longer than the Orthodoxy, have a lengthier history, have deeper foundational resources?

The Tang clan? When saying such things in front of the Orthodoxy, was this not a joke?

"You imprisoned me in the ancestral hall for half a year, allowing me to ponder a few problems."

Tang Thirty-Six took out a scroll and placed it on the table, saying to the Tang Old Master, "Some problems needed to be clarified and have now been clarified. Some problems needed to be prepared for in the future, and these are my preparations. Take a

look."

The scroll was densely covered in words, at least ten thousand.

As the Tang Old Master looked at these words, his expression turned colder and colder, his eyes narrowing more and more.

The room was quiet, the only sound that of the scroll being unrolled.

Chen Changsheng glanced at Tang Thirty-Six, wondering, just what did he write?

Tang Thirty-Six ignored him. He continued to quietly stare at the Old Master, his hands subconsciously clenching, his fingers slightly pale.

"You think that the situation will develop as you imagine?"

The Tang Old Master finally finished reading the scroll. He slowly raised his head and gave Tang Thirty-Six an emotionless gaze.

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "I am the sole grandson of the Tang clan. No one understands the Tang clan more than me. If I'm responsible for attacking the Tang clan, things will more or less develop in this fashion."

Chen Changsheng vaguely understood what was written in this scroll.

The Tang Old Master silently pondered for a very long time, then said, "I admit that you have a deep understanding of the family business, and I also admit that these plans of yours are truly quite sinister and vicious. But since you are the sole grandson of the Tang clan, how can you be so cruel and callous towards your own clan? Can you persuade yourself?"

Tang Thirty-Six said, "I will tell myself that I learned it from you. Shouldn't the head of the Tang clan be so cruel and callous?"

The Tang Old Master asked, "Then did you ever think what

would happen to the Human race if the Tang clan is destroyed?"

"I've always felt that the Tang clan's biggest problem is narcissism."

Tang Thirty-Six explained, "For one person, from a certain perspective, narcissism can add to one's charm, like it does with me. But for a clan, excessive narcissism is not a good trait, as it's liable to give one a mistaken perception of one's own importance and so cause mistakes when engaging in negotiations with the enemy. I hope that Sir will not make this mistake. The Tang clan is not as important as several of my uncles imagine. They think that if the Tang clan collapses, the human world will collapse with it, all the industries will fail, the people will be destitute and homeless, and everything will fall into chaos."

The Tang Old Master stared into his eyes and said, "The question is, how can you be so sure that such a situation will not occur?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "So what if it happens? With me here, as long as the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy don't lose their heads, the chaos will only persist for a year and a half at most."

The Tang Old Master's eyes grew colder and colder, "But did you ever think about how many people might starve to death in this year and a half?"

Tang Thirty-Six quietly stared at him, seemingly for ages, then said, "I might have starved to death in the ancestral hall. Did Sir ever think about that?"

At this moment, the Tang Old Master finally felt threatened.

Because Tang Thirty-Six was threatening him with the object that he cared about the most: the continued succession of the Tang clan throughout the ages.

And Tang Thirty-Six had succeeded in proving that he had the ability to end the clan. At the least, there was a chance that he could destroy the Tang clan and was willing to do it.

The Tang Old Master finally knew how this once-unruly and cheerful grandson of his had been changed by his half a year in the ancestral hall.

.....

.....

"If you really do this, your memorial tablet will have no right to enter the ancestral hall and your name will be stricken from the family register."

"On the first day that the Tang clan is ruined, I will have the ancestral hall burned down. I've already lived in it for half a year; do you think that I want to move back once I die?"

"What of the eternal infamy? Even if you're buried in the Li Palace, people will still spit at your grave whenever they pass it."

"If I can still climb out of my grave, I'll naturally spit back. If I can't, why do I care?"

"Are you so interested in being the greatest prodigal son in history?"

"I'm very interested. You're not prepared to give this clan to me, so why shouldn't I bring this clan to ruin?"

The common people would often describe heroism with the phrase, "[Spend a thousand pieces of gold, it'll all come back.](#)"

But to play the prodigal son to this level was what it truly meant to be heroic.

"If you give the Tang clan to me, then it's mine and I will guard it well. If you don't give the Tang clan to me, then there will come a day when I make it fall to ruin at my hands."

Tang Thirty-Six had a very serious expression as he spoke to the Tang Old Master. There was no sense that he was making a joke.

It was clear that he had two different meanings in mind with the word 'ruin'.

The Tang Old Master looked in his eyes and said, "Perhaps I should have killed you earlier."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "It's not too late now."

The Tang Old Master fell quiet for a very long time, then said, "That's true."

Chen Changsheng had remained quiet even longer than the Old Master, not saying very much since the start of this conversation. At this moment, he finally spoke.

He looked at the Tang Old Master and shook his head. "No."

This phrase originates from the poem 'Bringing In the Wine' by Li Bai. The poem could perhaps be described as an ode to Li Bai's love of wine and drinking.

Chapter 858 – Before and After the Sun Sets Behind the Mountains

Chen Changsheng had no idea why Tang Thirty-Six had come to the old estate or why he wanted to play a game of mahjong with the Tang Old Master.

Only when Tang Thirty-Six stated his demands did he finally understand.

Chen Changsheng had brought the people of the Orthodoxy and placed himself at great risk to come to Wenshui City. Only after putting up the most unyielding stance did they succeed in changing the Tang Old Master's mind.

Tang Thirty-Six was released from the ancestral hall while the Tang Second Master was imprisoned elsewhere.

An ordinary person would probably express their gratitude to Chen Changsheng and those fellows outside, and then think about how to repay them in the future. But Tang Thirty-Six was not an ordinary person, did not walk the ordinary path. He was keenly aware that such a friendship could only be repaid with the Tang clan.

The old estate was very quiet.

The snow on the brim of the well melted under the light of the sun, silently trickling into the well.

The Tang Old Master expressionlessly said, "If the Orthodoxy ultimately loses this war, then no matter how deep your understanding of the Tang clan, your hand will be empty. How can you threaten me then? Since you've thought in the ancestral hall for half a year, you must have thought of this. What, then, do you want to do?"

"I want Second Uncle to die, immediately. Before the sun sets behind the mountains today, he must die."

He looked into the Tang Old Master's eyes and calmly added, "And then I want the Tang clan to maintain a neutral position in this conflict."

The Tang Old Master fell quiet. After a long time, he asked, "If I say 'no', the words on this scroll will come into reality?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Correct."

The Tang Old Master looked at the green jade tiles on the table and slightly furrowed his brow. "You've truly made a mess of this mahjong game."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "I and Chen Changsheng are both young, and so are the people outside. We're naturally not as shrewd or ruthless as you in playing tiles. But we have the courage to flip the table over at any time, because we can play another round. But none of you can, because all of you are already old."

The Tang Old Master looked at Tang Thirty-Six and suddenly said, "Did you ever think that after yesterday, I might have already intended to make you clan head?"

Taking only the clan's benefit in mind, the events of yesterday had made it readily apparent that Tang Thirty-Six was the best candidate for successor of the Tang clan.

If Shang Xingzhou and the Imperial Court won, the Tang Old Master still had enough time to change Tang Thirty-Six's mind, or even just change his selection for clan head. If Chen Changsheng and the Orthodoxy won, the Tang Old Master just needed to pass the Tang clan to Tang Thirty-Six, and Wenshui City would be unaffected.

Chen Changsheng had never thought about these things, as they were rather complicated for him.

He was not skilled in sorting out the numerous rights and wrongs of the secular world, only skilled in seeing people.

Those days in the Orthodox Academy had made him clearly

aware that Tang Thirty-Six did not want to be clan head.

But Tang Thirty-Six would have to face these problems eventually, so why was his stance so fierce today?

"Even if I do become clan head, that's a matter for many years in the future. I care more about the clan's stance in these next few years."

Tang Thirty-Six added, "And besides, a unilateral promise is never as secure as an agreement made when both sides are threatened."

The Tang Old Master asked, "You don't believe in me?"

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "After all that has happened, do you not get the urge to laugh when you hear the word 'believe'?"

"From the day you were born, you were my choice to be the next head of the Tang clan. Don't forget, it's you, not your father! So that you could become clan head, just how many things did I do? Just how much did the Tang clan pay? And what happened? Unexpectedly, foolishly, for the sake of this thing called 'friendship', you insisted on standing at his side!"

The more the Tang Old Master spoke, the more infuriated he became, his voice growing louder and louder. At those final words, he pointed straight at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng silently moved to the side, avoiding that finger.

"Foolish friendship? Without this friendship, I would still be playing the mute in the ancestral hall."

Tang Thirty-Six finally flew into a rage, shouting, "If not for the fact that Chen Changsheng was my friend, I would have died three years ago!"

The Tang Old Master angrily replied, "Did you really think I would kill you?"

Tang Thirty-Six sneered, "Of course you would kill me. In any case, all you would need to do is wash your hands, eat a few vegetarian meals, and declare yourself guiltless!"

This was the second time that the words 'vegetarian meal' had appeared in the Tang clan's old estate.

Yesterday, news came from the ancestral hall that Tang Thirty-Six wanted a vegetarian meal from Chicken Crow Nunnery.

But before the vegetarian meal had been readied, everything had come to an end.

Just like yesterday, when he heard the words 'vegetarian meal', the Tang Old Master's expression became abnormally nasty and his hands began to tremble.

After some time, the Tang Old Master finally calmed and asked, "How was the taste?"

"It was night when the vegetarian meal was delivered to the ancestral hall. It was already cold."

Tang Thirty-Six thought for a while, then continued, "The taste was ordinary, and it wasn't even real meat. It was inferior to Clear Lake Restaurant, and also inferior to the Orthodox Academy's cafeteria."

The Tang Old Master said nothing for a very long time. Finally, he said, "Is that so? After I die, I don't know if anyone else will be willing to eat it."

"Grandfather, this is the greatest difference between us."

For the first time in this long conversation, Tang Thirty-Six finally said that word.

But this word did not warm the mood in the room. On the contrary, it made it even colder, just like his voice.

"Yes, in order to raise me into the next clan head, you've truly treated me extremely well these twenty-some years, and the clan

truly has paid a lot, but did you ever think... I didn't want those things, nor was it something that everyone in the clan was willing to accept, like the banning of all the other branches from having descendants!"

Tang Thirty-Six angrily continued, "Yes, my Tang clan is talented in cultivation and long-lived. After Sir's thousand years finally comes to an end and I fully take over the clan, the other branches can have as many children as they want. Those little brothers and sisters would be much younger than me, incapable of threatening me... but did the thought ever pass Sir's mind that this was too ruthless?"

"When Fourth Aunt secretly got pregnant and used the excuse of her mother's severe illness to hide in her parent's home for five months, you still ended up finding out. And then you forced Fourth Uncle to feed Fourth Aunt medicine to abort the child! Did you ever think about how much Fourth Aunt suffered? Compared to this, what do the resentful glares that the chief branch receives matter?"

"As for the vegetarian meal of Chicken Crow Mountain... don't worry, because I'm not you."

Tang Thirty-Six gave the Old Master a disappointed glance, then rose and left.

Chen Changsheng also left.

Only the Tang Old Master remained in the room.

He sat by the table, his thoughts inscrutable.

Those green mahjong tiles quietly lay on the table, untouched.

.....

.....

Dark clouds gathered. The banks of the river on this night were very quiet, very dark.

In the past, this part of the river would reflect the glow of many lanterns.

Tang Thirty-Six sat on the shore, gazing at the pitch-black of the opposite shore while thinking of the past.

Chen Changsheng was also there. Today, he was a guest at the estate of the Tang clan's chief branch, not as the Pope, but as a friend.

Not long ago, the old estate sent a message that the Tang Old Master had agreed to Tang Thirty-Six's demands. Was it because of that mahjong game, or was it because of the daring and resolve to flip over the table displayed by these youths?

Or perhaps it was because of the vegetarian meal from Chicken Crow Nunnery.

Tang Thirty-Six said suddenly, "Do you want to know this story?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "If you want to talk about it."

Chapter 859 – It's Pitch-Black on That Side

"I have an aunt that was raised in that nunnery. Grandfather wanted to leave a path of retreat for the Tang clan, or perhaps he wanted to ensure her safety, so he didn't dare let anyone know. But when I was small, he liked to put me on his knees and tell me many stories. This story was one of them, but he thought that I was too young back then. He had no idea that I remembered it all."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at the estate across the river, appearing somewhat in a trance as he talked.

Chen Changsheng glanced at him and asked, "Just how old were you then?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "About one year old."

Chen Changsheng replied, "You were actually able to remember something from when you were that young?"

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "Perhaps I developed fast."

Chen Changsheng sighed, "This is a little bit too fast."

"Who am I? I happen to be a genius."

This was quite the amusing joke, but neither Chen Changsheng nor Tang Thirty-Six laughed.

After a while, Tang Thirty-Six continued, "I don't know who the Old Master had that daughter with, but in his entire life, he has probably only loved that woman, so the person he truly dotes on is that daughter. It's precisely because he dotes on her that I know that the Old Master will not let her become clan head, and I also don't fear. So I was willing to reveal this matter. Yeah, you're right, I just wanted to use that woman in Chicken Crow Nunnery to threaten Grandfather."

Chen Changsheng didn't know what to say.

Tang Thirty-Six glanced at him and asked, "Do you think that I'm

cruel and callous?"

"Daoist Baishi is dead... It was on my order."

Chen Changsheng suddenly brought up this seemingly unrelated matter, his gaze dropping down to the dark waters of the river.

Yesterday, the Tang clan's Fivekind Man and Chusu had engaged in pitched battle here. Poisonous blood had sprayed everywhere, polluting both banks with a foul and toxic Qi.

The Tang clan had already begun to clean up, but still many fish had died.

Both he and Tang Thirty-Six had excellent eyesight. Even in this gloomy environment, they could still see those dead fish in the rotten and dark mud of the river.

In the Orthodox Academy, Tang Thirty-Six had told him to not sink into the mud, but what about now?

Chen Changsheng commented, "Do you think that we've become those people that we used to loathe the most?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "If we can change something by becoming them, then it's also fine."

Chen Changsheng asked, "For example?"

Tang Thirty-Six pointed at the opposite shore. "If you hadn't acted that way, the darkness on that side would have fallen behind us."

The river separated the estates of the chief branch and the second branch. No lights could be seen on the opposite shore, all consumed by a somewhat sinister pitch-black.

From yesterday until now, many people had died in the second branch.

Just like Tang Thirty-Six had said, if they had been the ones to lose, this tragic end would have been the chief branch's to bear.

Tang Thirty-Six said, "Thank you."

Chen Changsheng answered, "You're welcome."

.....

.....

According to Tang Thirty-Six's demand, before the sun set behind the mountains, the Tang Second Master died.

On the morning of the second day, Tang Thirty-Six went personally to inspect the corpse and make sure that there was nothing suspicious.

The Orthodoxy dispatched Linghai Zhiwang. According to the report he made to Chen Changsheng on his return, Tang Thirty-Six had been very quiet, apparently lost in thought.

Once he took the medicine personally brewed by Chen Changsheng, the Tang First Master's illness was stabilized, but he still did not wake from his coma.

That sinister poison had already seeped deep into his organs, making it very difficult to completely remove it. Action was needed on the Longevity Sect's part.

The Tang clan had already sent people to the Longevity Sect. It was said that the blind zither player might be traveling with them in secret. Tang Thirty-Six was still not at ease and decided to make a personal visit.

Chen Changsheng also had to go south. He had a few very important matters that needed handling.

It had already been three years since the confluence of the north and south, and there was now a chance that the northern and southern Orthodoxy could reunite.

In the Orthodoxy's southern faction, the Longevity Sect was a shell of its former self, devoid of strength and only able to perform a few small actions from the shadows. The one the Li Palace

needed to persuade was Holy Maiden Peak.

Given the relationship between Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong, there really was a chance that this matter might succeed, and the Orthodoxy really might regain its former glory.

To the Orthodoxy, this was naturally an excellent matter, but the Imperial Court would not see it this way.

They all left Wenshui City, upon which it was time to part.

The first to leave was Guan Feibai. Logically speaking, since Mount Li and the Longevity Sect were both in the south, he could have traveled together with Chen Changsheng's group. However, he had received news that his eldest brother would return to the mountain in a few days, so he was inevitably in somewhat of a rush. The day before yesterday, when Chen Changsheng went to the old estate, he had stayed in the Daoist church to recover from his injuries and remained unaware that a certain person had appeared outside the old estate.

Chen Changsheng had a vague understanding of a few things and said to Guan Feibai, "I've met your senior brother. Give him my well wishes."

Guan Feibai believed that he was speaking of Gou Hanshi. Without pondering the matter any further, he agreed, then he said to Zhexiu, "If your illness is cured, you can come to Mount Li any time, and no one will stop you. But if your illness can't be cured and you are destined to meet a sudden death, don't come to bring your curse on Junior Sister. None of us will let you meet."

Zhexiu's expression did not change, as if he had not heard.

Chen Changsheng offered a sword to Guan Feibai. "Your sword broke, so I've picked one out for you. I don't know if it's suitable for you though."

In the back garden of the Daoist church, the sword that Guan Feibai had bought with a few taels of silver had been broken by

Chusu. Chen Changsheng had wanted to give him a sword this entire time. He had not gifted the sword in the past two days because, besides Guan Feibai's injuries, he also did not want to drag the Mount Li Sword Sect into the rotten matter that was his business with the Tang clan.

Everyone knew that Chen Changsheng had many swords at his side, and they were all excellent swords.

Guan Feibai looked at this ancient, yet sharp sword, his eyes glowing.

This sword was also from the Garden of Zhou, from the Sword Pool, and it was called Army Shattering. It emphasized a strength that could shatter thousands of armies and was extremely suitable for his personality. Surprisingly, Guan Feibai did not immediately accept it. He seemed to think for a while, then said, "I didn't contribute much to this matter, and we already owe you far too many favors. We can't owe more."

He was referring to how his martial uncle of the Mount Li Sword Sect had been saved by the Cinnabar Pill, and also that old matter from several years ago of Chen Changsheng escorting Su Li back to the south.

The matters of their eldest brother and the engagement, and their junior sister and Zhexiu, led to the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect being very unwilling to owe Chen Changsheng any favors.

Or else it would truly be very awkward for them if they came into conflict with Chen Changsheng.

"If you really feel like there's any sort of debt, they were all cleared two days ago."

Chen Changsheng was referring to the scene that had taken place in front of the old estate two days ago. If Luo Bu had not taken the Yellow Paper Umbrella and spoken with the Tang Old Master, the

Tang Old Master would never have given him two hours of Wenshui City's time, and the events that followed would never have happened.

Guan Feibai didn't understand what he meant, so he was still unwilling to take the sword.

Tang Thirty-Six said, "Just what's one sword worth? I took several hundred swords from him and didn't feel anything."

Guan Feibai shot back, "That's because there are very few people in the world with as thick a skin as you."

Tang Thirty-Six retorted, "That's called being elegant and unrestrained... Take the sword. If you really do have a falling out, just don't use the sword."

Guan Feibai thought this over, then agreed. "That truly is quite reasonable. If that really does come about, remember to remind me."

Chapter 860 – Parting Beneath the Peach Blossoms Outside the Nunnery

The second group to depart was the largest.

That the Tang Old Master had agreed to stay out of the conflict between the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy was already the best that the Li Palace could hope for.

Archbishops Linghai Zhiwang and An Lin were taking the several thousand Orthodoxy cavalry and returning to the capital to deal with the new situation.

Linghai Zhiwang asked, "When will Your Holiness return?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "On the day that I should return, I will return."

Linghai Zhiwang and An Lin left. Countless plumes of dust were stirred in the plains to the north, gradually enveloping this old city.

As he looked at this far-off sight, Tang Thirty-Six suddenly said, "Don't believe that the Tang Old Master will always maintain a neutral position. He intentionally let Chusu go that day."

By now, Chen Changsheng had already learned the specific details of that battle on the shores of the Wenshui, so he nodded his head to indicate that he understood.

The Tang clan's Fivekind Man was truly terrifying, and they had fought within Wenshui City. No matter how formidable Chusu was, there was no reason that he should have escaped.

"Since that blind zither player was the last of the Longevity Sect's great elders, one could understand if he went easy."

The speaker was the Archbishop of Wenshui City.

As the Orthodoxy's top-ranking individual within Wenshui City,

he had played an extremely important role in this matter and been very effective.

The Tang clan would probably not take out their anger on him, but if he stayed in Wenshui City's Daoist church, the Tang clan would presumably find him an irksome presence. Chen Changsheng and Linghai Zhiwang had already agreed that the Li Palace would soon dispatch a new archbishop to take up the post in Wenshui. The problem now was to arrange matters for the former archbishop.

Logically speaking, since the Archbishop of Wenshui had performed such a meritorious deed for the Orthodoxy, it was only right that he return to the capital and take an even nobler position. However, he had personally killed Daoist Baishi, so if he returned to the capital, he would definitely be regarded as an eyesore by some people in the Orthodoxy and encounter many difficulties. As a result, Chen Changsheng had still not made a decision.

"We're about to leave. Have you finishing thinking?" Chen Changsheng asked the archbishop.

The Archbishop of Wenshui replied, "This lowly one only wishes to attend at Your Holiness's side."

Tang Thirty-Six commented, "This position is truly better than any position in the Li Palace."

To the people of the Orthodoxy, what was the best position? It was naturally the position closest to His Holiness the Pope.

Whether the Pope was in the south, the north, or the desolate frontier of the west, as long as one could remain at his side throughout the year, they would assuredly receive the greatest benefits.

The archbishop faintly smiled, his expression meek. He did not refute Tang Thirty-Six's words, saying, "Sir speaks reason."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and asked, "This position is a

shortcut to another position, so what is the position that you want the most?"

The Archbishop of Wenshui earnestly replied, "I have no hopes of reaching the Divine in my life. I only wish that before I return to the sea of stars, I can become a great archbishop."

Tang Thirty-Six curiously asked, "Which Sacred Hall?"

"The Grass Moon Hall."

The Archbishop of Wenshui returned the answer very quickly. It was evident that he had thought about this matter for a very long time.

Tang Thirty-Six couldn't help but smile at this answer.

The Grass Moon Hall was one of the Li Palace's Six Halls, the residence of the Archbishop of the Hall of Announcements.

The previous Archbishop of the Hall of Announcements, Mu Jiushi, had been banished from the Orthodoxy by the Pope, after which the Grass Moon Hall remained masterless.

The archbishop's goal was extremely certain, and it was also very reasonable.

"I quite admire you. Might I ask for Sir's esteemed name?" Tang Thirty-Six asked.

The archbishop was the highest-ranked representative of the Orthodoxy in Wenshui City and had lived in Wenshui City for many years, but Tang Thirty-Six still did not know his name.

The archbishop smiled and said, "The Old Master liked to call me Little Hu (户). Sir can also call me this."

The Tang Old Master could call him whatever he pleased, but Tang Thirty-Six did not have this right. He somewhat hesitantly asked, "Little Hu (胡)?"

"Hu, the Hu of '[peasant household](#)'," Chen Changsheng chimed in. "He's called Hu Thirty-Two."

Tang Thirty-Six's eyes glowed at this name. He quite appreciated this name and asked, "A good name; is it a rank or your place in your family?"

"When I was little, the place that I lived suffered an earthquake. In the entire village, only thirty-two households remained. My entire family died, with me the only survivor, so I was raised by all thirty-two households." The archbishop added, "I made my name this to remind myself that living is no easy feat, so I must not die early."

.....

.....

Their party left Wenshui City, heading southeast. A mountain stood before their eyes.

Even in midwinter, despite the constant snow over the last two days, this mountain was still lush and verdant.

This mountain was not very tall. Between the green trees, one could see ten-some peach blossoms blooming.

There was probably a hot spring in this mountain, or else there was an array like the one in Wenshui's Daoist church.

Seeing the peach blossoms and green trees of this mountain, Chen Changsheng recalled that one year of somewhat lonely but still tranquil and delightful life in the snowy mountains. He began to feel concerned for the little Black Dragon.

He had no idea whether her journey to the west was proceeding smoothly or not.

One could faintly see the roof of a Daoist temple in between the trees and peach blossoms.

Tang Thirty-Six silently gazed over there.

Chen Changsheng asked, "This is Chicken Crow Mountain?"

Tang Thirty-Six silently nodded.

This being so, his aunt was probably in that temple.

"Have you met?" Chen Changsheng asked.

Tang Thirty-Six shook his head, but after a few moments, nodded his head.

"When I was little, I didn't understand much, but I always remembered this matter. I secretly went to the mountain to see, and then I met..."

What happened after they met? Did she recognize who he was? Did they talk?

Was it just one meeting, or were there still many more seemingly unintentional, yet actually deliberate meetings? He had stopped speaking. Was it for the safety and peaceful life of the woman in the temple that they best not meet, or even mention her? Then they probably would not meet again, would they?

.....

.....

After flowing southeast for thirty-some li, the Wenshui flowed into the River of Hatred, losing its own name.

As one of the most renowned rivers of the continent, the River of Hatred originated from the depths of the Cloud Grave. After flowing through the fertile country of the south and through the vast Luomei Mountains, it took on many tributaries, building up a grandiose momentum. But only if one traveled upstream, traversing the canyons that the river traveled through, would one bear witness to the truly magnificent sights.

Chen Changsheng's party traveled in these canyons. High mountains thrust into the clouds on either side. The forests were dense, and other people a rare sight. The only sounds were the cries of apes and monkeys, and there was no need to worry about being followed, nor was there any concern over safety. This was not the northern frontier, so they could not meet some demon

expert, and it was difficult to gather a large number of troops. This wasn't Wenshui City, which was filled with countless experts.

The farther they traveled upstream, the steeper the walls of the canyons became, and the more abrupt the course of the river. The water was no less rapid or forceful, its thunderous rumbling constantly resounding in one's ear. As they traveled upstream, the canyons gradually began to show signs of habitation. However, they could often travel for half a day and see only a few households. For the most part, all they saw was wilderness.

Before Hu Thirty-Two became Archbishop of Wenshui, he had preached in these canyons for many years, so he had a very deep understanding of the people and customs in this area. He spoke of them throughout the journey, so when Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six listened while looking at the sights on the banks of the river, they naturally would not feel bored. Nanke followed with a confused expression, her hand latched onto Chen Changsheng's clothes, and it was hard to tell whether she could understand what was being said. Zhexiu kept his vigilant gaze on the surrounding mountains and forests, looking for any sign of activity, bereft of any interest in this idle chatter.

As long as there were people, one would assuredly find people of the Orthodoxy, allowing news to be sent to them.

At a natural river crossing, they received the latest news.

Two days ago, someone saw some dripping wet monster kill and eat two shepherd boys outside Fengyang City.

'胡' and '户' have different tones, though they share the same pronunciation. '胡' means 'beard' while '户' means 'household/family'.

Chapter 861 – The Aroma of Tea Fills Both the Mountain and City

On hearing the news, Chen Changsheng fell into a long period of thought.

After several days, their party reached Fengyang City.

Fengyang City was a county city and was administered by the Feng City government. Although it was much smaller than other county cities, it was extremely bustling compared to other places in these canyons.

Standing on the cliff and looking at the distant lights of this city, the group decided to rest for the night and enter the city in the morning.

Recalling the somewhat sensitive nature of Nanke's identity, Chen Changsheng sent her into the Garden of Zhou.

She had completely forgotten the past events in the Garden of Zhou, but she quite enjoyed its environment, so she did not resist the notion.

Because Tang Thirty-Six had been viewing the monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books at the time, he had never entered the Garden of Zhou. Out of curiosity, he asked if Chen Changsheng could send him in so that he could play a while.

But not long after he entered, he came out.

The reason he found the Garden of Zhou to be interesting and the reason Nanke found it so enjoyable were one and the same.

There was no one inside the Garden of Zhou, only countless monsters.

Nanke instinctively felt relaxed there, and such a fact could only make Tang Thirty-Six feel bored.

To Chen Changsheng's surprise, Zhexiu also wanted to enter the Garden of Zhou.

He quietly sat in the plains for a while, then came out and said to Chen Changsheng, "These plains aren't interesting now. The sun sets behind the mountains."

The seal that prevented the sun from setting over the plains had been broken, and the number of monsters living in the Garden of Zhou was continuing to increase.

Chen Changsheng knew that the true reason for Zhexiu's lack of interest was not that the sun did not set, but that the girl that accompanied him in watching the sun was no longer here.

At five in the morning, Chen Changsheng calmed his mind and opened his eyes to look down at the river below. He felt a little regret.

He had spent the entire night spreading his spiritual sense on both sides of the canyon, wanting to find any trace of Chusu, but his search had proved fruitless.

The climate in the canyon was much warmer than the climate on the plains beyond the mountains, and Fengyang City was much warmer than Wenshui City. Even in midwinter, no snow fell, and a cotton jacket might even feel a little too warm. Just like those thick chains on the surface of the river, they did not have any metallic chill from basking in the sunlight, but rather a scalding heat.

Fengyang City was built along the mountains. As one walked along the cliffs towards the city, tea trees could be seen all over, and these tea trees had clearly just been harvested.

Seeing the confused expressions on the faces of Chen Changsheng's party, Hu Thirty-Two explained, "This place is rich in wild tea. In the winter, this wild tea has the best taste. In the past ten-some years, Fengyang's wild tea has been growing more

and more famous, and the wild tea harvested in winter has become a precious product. Every year, a tea party will be held, with the county magistrate and the bishop personally attending, and the varieties of tea gathered there are too numerous to be counted."

It was still early morning, but Fengyang City was extremely busy. On both sides of the main street running along the river, several dozen tea shops were already open. The sounds of hollering and greeting went on without end, and one could always smell the plain aroma of tea carried along by the morning wind.

Led by Hu Thirty-Two, Chen Changsheng's party first strolled around Seven Treasures Stronghold, and then went down to the river to see the famous White Dragon Carving. As the sunlight intensified, they found a quiet tea house near the ferry crossing to sit down, both to rest and to wait for the latest report.

Seven Treasures Stronghold was a smaller version of the county city. Built along the mountains, it was divided into seven layers, but there was nothing remarkable about it. Moreover, preparations for the tea party had led to the upper three levels being sealed. It also just so happened to be the winter floods, so a large part of the White Dragon Carving was immersed in the river. Tang Thirty-Six was rather unhappy, and it was only after he drank some tea that his mood recovered somewhat.

"I didn't expect for this tea to actually be quite good." He raised the cup in his hands and inspected it, somewhat shocked.

The wild tea in the cup was still steaming, its aroma thick, but not cloying. It seemed to contain a sort of wild nature.

"In terms of tea tasting, the first person that people think of is often Liang Wangsun, but Painted Armor Xiao Zhang has always regarded Liang Wangsun with contempt, believing that his was a false reputation and had long since lost interest. At one point, there was some busybody that once inquired on precisely this matter to Liang Wangsun. Liang Wangsun laughed and said, "I'm

unconvinced of his fighting prowess, but I have to yield to him in terms of tea."

Hu Thirty-Two continued, "It was only at this point that people learned that Xiao Zhang was also a lover of tea, and he had never liked those famous teas. He only liked to search for wild teas in the forests, the humble villages and small temples. The fame of Fengyang City's wild tea is completely dependent on Xiao Zhang making it known over these past few years."

When drinking tea, if there were no snacks to eat, then there had to be interesting topics to converse about, as only this way could one chat over tea. Hu Thirty-Two was the most tactful and understanding individual in the Orthodoxy, so he naturally would not let such a good topic slip by.

Tang Thirty-Six was a descendant of a noble clan, so he naturally found this topic interesting. Alas, Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu had never had anything to do with the word 'sophistication'. When they listened to these words, they did not think about the quality of Fengyang City's tea or how Liang Wangsun and Xiao Zhang spent their leisure time, but of some very dull matters.

"I wonder who's stronger between Liang Wangsun and Xiao Zhang," Chen Changsheng said.

Everyone knew that this was currently the cultivating world's generation of blooming flowers, and this generation had been opened by Wang Po, Xiao Zhang, Liang Wangsun, Xun Mei, and the Tang Second Master.

Of this generation's distinguished individuals, Wang Po was unquestionably the strongest, but both Painted Armor Xiao Zhang and Liang Wangsun were extraordinary individuals.

In Xunyang City, Chen Changsheng had met Xiao Zhang and Liang Wangsun. Later on, on the day that he killed Zhou Tong, he had met Xiao Zhang again.

On that snowy day, he was assaulting the Department for Purging Officials while Wang Po was on the snowy river, severing his arm, breaking into the Divine Domain, and slaying Tie Shu with a single strike of his blade. In the end, it was Xiao Zhang that rescued Wang Po.

Everyone understood why Xiao Zhang had done this.

If one said that Liang Wangsun's lifelong goal was so clear that the entire continent knew, just what was Xiao Zhang pursuing?

"Xiao Zhang is stronger than Liang Wangsun."

Zhexiu was the one to pass this judgment. The basis for his words naturally did not rest on the rankings of the Proclamation of Liberation.

"His lifelong pursuit has always been to be the strongest. His goal is clear and his methods are even simpler, so comparatively speaking, he is even more frightening."

What was Xiao Zhang's martial path? It was not the killing path of Zhou Dufu, not the straight path of Wang Po. His path was one of fighting.

Whether he could beat an opponent or not, he wanted to fight. The more unbeatable they were, the more he wanted to fight them, such that many people regarded him as insane.

Over the past decades, he had fought Wang Po countless times. He had never won, but he had also never admitted his loss.

At present, Wang Po was already an expert of the Divine Domain, and the discrepancy in strength was many times greater than in the past, but it could be presumed that Xiao Zhang still had not given up.

From this perspective, Wang Po's words on the snowy street were correct: the Tang Second Master was far inferior to people like Xiao Zhang and Xun Mei.

Hu Thirty-Two suddenly said, "Xiao Zhang's situation over these last few years has been rather miserable."

Chapter 862 – A Prince Appears from the Rivers and Hills of the Generation

For an expert like Xiao Zhang to have his situation described with the word 'miserable' meant that he truly must be in the direst of straits.

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Because he saved Wang Po that time?"

Hu Thirty-Two replied, "Correct. In the capital, he ruined the venerable Daoist's plan, infuriating all levels of the government. Right now, the Imperial Court cannot lightly touch Wang Po, but it certainly wouldn't let Xiao Zhang go. In order to establish its might and gain back some of its dignity, it's been constantly pursuing him these past years as a wanted criminal. He's been chased around like a stray dog. It truly is quite miserable."

For Painted Armor Xiao Zhang, an expert of the Proclamation of Liberation, to be placed on the wanted list by the Imperial Court and be hunted down seemed somewhat unbelievable.

But it could not be forgotten that the Imperial Court had countless experts. They could take shifts to rest, but Xiao Zhang was alone, with no relatives or friends. No matter where he went, he had to be vigilant, careful, and concealed, or else when he went out to eat some noodles, he might run into the most sinister assassin from the Department for Purging Officials or the most seasoned bailiff of the Ministry of Justice. And this was not limited to just one day, but every moment of his life.

Tang Thirty-Six glanced at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng knew what he meant and shook his head. "I had the Li Palace send someone with a message, but he wasn't even willing to meet them."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Wang Po then? He should be doing something."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Two years ago, when I last received news from this area, Xiao Zhang had announced in advance that if Wang Po attempted to help him, he would commit suicide on the spot."

Tang Thirty-Six could not help but conclude that this was truly in alignment with Xiao Zhang's personality. Shaking his head, he said, "He truly can't bear the shame of taking that person's help."

Hu Thirty-Two said, "Because Xiao Zhang was responsible for making Fengyang City's winter wild tea famous in the continent, every year, Fengyang City will always set aside a box of the best tea leaves for him. If not for the fact that the Imperial Court was chasing him too closely, we might have been able to see Xiao Zhang in the next few days."

Both shores of the river here were lined with tea trees. After the leaves were plucked from the trees, they were dried in the sun, piled in mountains of tea within the city. The batches of winter wild tea were then graded and divided into batches that were arrayed along the stone steps of Seven Treasures Stronghold. The higher one went, the fewer leaves there were, and their value naturally increased as well. Based on this ordering, the two most valuable baskets of tea leaves were placed at the very top.

Hu Thirty-Two now pointed at this place and explained, "The tea leaves in those two baskets far outvalue the same amount of gold, and if even you did put a price on it, no merchant would buy it, no place would sell it."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Where are those two boxes of tea going to?"

Hu Thirty-Two answered, "Both of them are tribute. One basket will enter the palace."

Chen Changsheng asked, "And the other basket?"

Hearing this question, Tang Thirty-Six looked at him like he was

an idiot. Hu Thirty-Two also had a rather strange expression as he explained, "It's naturally for Your Holiness."

Chen Changsheng finally understood that since these precious tea leaves were tribute, since one was being sent to the Imperial Palace, the other one would naturally be sent to the Li Palace.

No matter what the relationship between the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy was, a small place like Fengyang City had to pay the greatest respect to both sides.

"Were the tea leaves left for Xiao Zhang also of this sort?" Tang Thirty-Six asked.

Hu Thirty-Two shook his head and pointed at the treasure pavilion at the very top of Seven Treasures Stronghold. "The wild tea given to Xiao Zhang is special and is placed in there."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "Given Xiao Zhang's personality, even if the Imperial Court might choose this place to surround and kill him, he still might end up coming."

Hu Thirty-Two noted, "It's already been two years since his last visit."

Tang Thirty-Six inquired, "Then who gets the tea?"

Hu Thirty-Two explained, "On the surface, it naturally won't be given out, but many people know it was sent to the Prince of Xiang's estate in the capital."

Tang Thirty-Six asked in surprise, "Why is that? Just how can the Prince of Xiang take precedence over the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy?"

Hu Thirty-Two smiled and explained, "The magistrate of the Feng City government is the prince's pupil."

As they chatted over tea, a wispy thread was torn out of the thin clouds. A Red Goose broke through the clouds and descended to the distant county office.

Soon after, gongs and drums began to sound, an announcement was posted, and joyous music erupted from the county office.

For the past three years, Chen Changsheng had been in the mountains of the northern frontier and Tang Thirty-Six had been imprisoned in the old estate and the ancestral hall, so neither of them understood what was happening.

"The Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets has updated the rankings," Hu Thirty-Two said with a mixed expression.

Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six understood what was happening.

In the past, the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets would either update the rankings around the Grand Examination or around when people emerged from the Mausoleum of Books after comprehending the monoliths. At present, it had been three years since the last Grand Examination and the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets was already a hollow name, but the proclamations continued to be updated. However, it now had little to do with the Orthodoxy, with most of the work being carried out by the Imperial Court.

But this did not affect the credibility of the proclamations. After all, to the common people, the awesome reputation of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets still existed, and now the addition of the Emperor's seal made the rankings even more trustworthy.

The conversations in the tea house came to an end. Everyone quietly sipped their tea while listening to the voice on the street.

The first proclamation to be announced was still the Proclamation of Azure Sky. Led by Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng, more and more geniuses who could reach Ethereal Opening at a young age appeared, and this ranking which once represented those young geniuses with potential gradually fell out of the limelight. But Chen Changsheng noticed that there were a few familiar names on the Proclamation of Azure Sky.

Fu Xinzhi, Chen Fugui, and Chu Wenbin were all part of the Orthodox Academy's first batch of students.

It appeared that Su Moyu was managing the Orthodox Academy rather well.

In contrast to the way the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets used to handle things, when the Imperial Court updated the rankings, it would also publicly announce the Proclamation of Golden Distinction and Proclamation of Liberation as well. What was announced next was the Proclamation of Golden Distinction. This time, there were even more familiar names: Gou Hanshi, Guan Feibai, Liang Banhu, Zhong Hui... His and Xu Yourong's statuses meant that they were naturally excluded from any ranking, but nevertheless, this year's Proclamation of Golden Distinction was still the ranking with the lowest average age in centuries. Other than the generation of Zhou Dufu and Chen Xuanba, no other period had so many youths entering the Star Condensation Realm. This time period was truly worthy of its name as the generation of blooming flowers.

Afterwards was the Proclamation of Liberation. With Wang Po's breakthrough three years ago, he finally relinquished the top ranking that he had guarded for several decades. Since Xiao Zhang was wanted by the Imperial Court and being pursued, he did not have the right to be included in the rankings, so the top spot naturally fell to Liang Wangsun. Following behind him were Xiao De and other such true experts whose names were already spread far and wide, but when Chen Changsheng heard 'Famous Name Guan Bai' at the ninth rank, he couldn't help but be somewhat delighted.

When he still did not hear Qiushan Jun's name, even after the Proclamation of Liberation was completely announced, he looked upstream and shook his head. It was hard to tell what was on his mind.

Suddenly, fireworks shot up from the distant county office.

Diluted by the flourishing morning sun, they were not very gorgeous. They had presumably been prepared on short notice for some sort of event.

Why would joyous music be played from the county office, why would there be fireworks, and most importantly... why would the Imperial Court suddenly update the rankings?

Very quickly, Chen Changsheng's party in the tea house and everyone else along the river knew the reason.

The Prince of Xiang had entered the Divine Domain!

The title of this chapter once more refers to the poem '其二' by the Qing Dynasty poet Zhao Yi.

Chapter 863 – Winter's Wild Spear and Tea

The magistrate of Feng City, who had arrived at Fengyang City yesterday for the tea party, was now receiving many congratulations from the people within the county office.

Hearing this news, the group in the tea house looked at each other speechlessly, a chill running through their hearts.

No could have expected that the Prince of Xiang would truly succeed in entering the Divine Domain during his seclusion.

From the moment he crossed that threshold, so long as he did not scheme or compete against the venerable Daoist, his status in the Great Zhou Dynasty would be unshakable.

Whether in the Imperial Court or the military, the Prince of Xiang had immense power, and now that he had entered the Divine Domain, he had unquestionably become a truly powerful minister.

Chen Changsheng recalled how Xu Yourong's assessment of the Prince of Xiang had been very poor. She had said that although the prince possessed outstanding talent, he was licentious and brutal, never once striving for the Divine. It now seemed that all this had naturally been an act.

That the Prince of Xiang had kept up this act for so long meant that he had grand schemes, meant that he was incredibly ambitious.

As the most powerful prince of the Great Zhou Dynasty, if he still had ambitions, his goal was glaringly obvious.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat concerned for his faraway senior brother deep within the palace.

At this moment, another announcement resounded through the street.

The Prince of Xiang's entry into the Divine Domain was unexpectedly not the entirety of the reason for this update of rankings.

Three months ago, the Mount Li Sword Sect Master had used his heart to cleanse his sword and successfully entered the Divine Domain!

This news instantly swept away the oppressive mood in the tea house, a cool breeze coming off the river.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "Congratulations."

There had once been many grudges and disputes between the Orthodox Academy and the Mount Li Sword Sect, even a hostility that was very difficult to resolve, but those were all matters of the past.

Everyone in the continent knew that between the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy, the Mount Li Sword Sect was undoubtedly supporting the latter. They were Chen Changsheng's allies.

The Mount Li Sword Sect Master's entry to the Divine Domain was naturally an excellent matter for Chen Changsheng and the Orthodoxy.

Although one expert of the Divine Domain could not alter the difference in the strength of the two sides, the news could at least lessen the shock brought by the Prince of Xiang.

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, so such a major event has taken place at Mount Li. No wonder Luo Bu and Guan Feibai were in such a rush to get back.

Everyone was happy, with only Zhexiu showing no emotion.

Tang Thirty-Six understood why this was and said consolingly, "You're thinking too much. In any case, even if the Sect Master of the Mount Li Sword Sect hadn't entered the Divine Domain, you still wouldn't be able to beat him."

After delivering its message, the Red Goose had probably taken some food and water in the county office and rested for a while. Now, it took flight once more, swiftly flying along the mountain roads of the county city towards the river. Presumably, once it reached a more open area, it would flap its wings, break through the clouds, and travel to more remote and distant lands to deliver the Imperial Court's will.

The people of the city looked at that red silhouette flying low through the air like a lightning bolt and began to clap in excitement. Countless gazes followed it, including those of Chen Changsheng's party in the tea house. They watched as the Red Goose flew over the river, flapped its wings, and quickly flew past those chains and high up into the sky.

Suddenly, countless crossbow bolts shot out from the forest on the opposite shore!

The Red Goose was caught utterly unprepared. Struck by a crossbow bolt, it dropped into the river and quickly vanished from sight.

Everyone who saw this was stunned.

Chen Changsheng's expression turned somewhat grave.

He could clearly see that these crossbow bolts had not been targeted at the Red Goose.

Those crossbow bolts emanated a terrifying Qi. They had probably been launched from divine crossbows.

Even the most important Red Goose would not require such a dense rain of crossbow bolts, much less ones fired by divine crossbows.

And the information carried by this Red Goose had no relation to any urgent military intelligence.

What was the true target of those divine crossbows?

Several clouds drifted in the sky above the river, unable to block out the morning light, and certainly no harbinger of some storm.

But at this moment, some massive boom that could almost burst one's eardrums exploded in the sky, like a clap of summer thunder.

Countless crossbow bolts once more shot through the sky, vanishing somewhere. They were soon followed by ten-some bizarre and frightening sword glows flashing in the sky.

A cloud suddenly scattered and a howl pierced through the air.

The river suddenly fell into turmoil, turbid waves reaching for the sky. The forest on the opposite shore was suddenly blown about in a furious gale. Countless trees snapped, after which groans and screams rose from the forest.

Countless gouts of blood splattered out of the dense forest and fell on the river. Just like the Red Goose, they very quickly vanished from sight.

The chain spanning the river began to fiercely sway, incessantly clattering.

A pair of very tattered leather boots stepped on the chain.

No matter how fiercely the chains swayed, how swiftly the waters flowed, or how sharp those crossbow bolts and sword glows were, those tattered boots stood firmly on the chain.

A gale continued to howl over the river, blowing against the white sheet of paper, causing it to flap so loudly that not even the clattering of the chain could conceal it.

That person stood on the chain, his face masked in a white sheet of paper with several holes poked in it. In sum, it was a terrifying visage.

But compared to the past, the white paper on his face was missing a small section and was speckled with a few blackened bloodstains, most likely the marks left behind by some long-ago

injury.

It was clear that he had suffered very serious wounds, and he had been chased so constantly ever since that he had not had a single moment to rest.

Any other person in these circumstances would be thinking about escape, or at least about conserving some strength.

But this person did not. He wielded his famous spear and blocked all the crossbow bolts, routed the sharp sword glows, and walked over to Fengyang City.

Countless gazes fell on his body and followed his footsteps, everyone silent and nervous.

This person shouted at the city, "Where's daddy's tea! Who dares to touch it!"

All of Fengyang City was silent, not a single person daring to answer.

With a single shout, the entire city was silenced.

This person was truly completely unbridled.

[He was truly worthy of being called Painted Armor Xiao Zhang.](#)

.....

.....

Fengyang City's winter wild tea had gained fame through Xiao Zhang, but because of the Imperial Court's close pursuit, he had not attended Fengyang City's winter wild tea party for two years, and the city elders sent the box of tea they had promised him to the Prince of Xiang's estate. No one had expected him to appear this year, but, rather unfortunately, he did.

No one in the city knew how to respond.

The chain clattered as it swayed, the river waters crashed as they seethed. These were the only sounds.

Xiao Zhang walked down from the chain and stood on the soil of Fengyang City. He began to ascend the long flight of stone steps.

At the top of these stone steps was the Seven Treasures Stronghold.

At the highest point of the Seven Treasures Stronghold was the treasure pavilion.

Within the treasure pavilion was a box of tea.

Had he really come to take his tea?

'Unbridled', '嚣张', shares the same pronunciation as '肖张', which is Xiao Zhang.

Chapter 864 – [A Porter Forged From Steel](#)

Ten-some warships belonging to the Great Zhou Navy appeared downstream, each manned by many soldiers armed with divine crossbows.

With a whoosh, many experts of the Imperial Court went ashore and ran into Fengyang City.

Several Daoists, their blue clothes drifting about them, flew out of the forest on the opposite shore. They gently touched the navy ships and then landed on the other shore.

The blue-clothed Daoists had cold, unfathomable expressions, and wielded Dao swords. They came from the Monastery of Eternal Spring in Luoyang.

The tattered leather boots stepped on the stone steps still not dry from the morning dew.

The tea merchants and pedestrians on both sides of the stone steps subconsciously backed away as this person approached, perhaps out of fear or out of shame.

Xiao Zhang didn't even look at these people, ignored those experts of the Imperial Court pursuing him. Holding his spear, he expressionlessly continued forward.

A few gasps came from some corner of the street and then rapidly faded away. Amidst the restless crowd, one could faintly see the cold glint of crossbow bolts.

The blue-clothed Daoists flew onto the stone steps like cranes. Behind Xiao Zhang, they had solemn expressions, able to attack at any moment.

The path from the river to the Seven Treasures Stronghold was completely made up of stone steps. Someone with nothing better to do had once counted them, finding that there were over seven thousand steps.

A normal person would need a very long time to walk them all.

But Xiao Zhang, even when burdened by heavy wounds, did not need much time.

In a few moments, he had reached the middle of the flight of steps. On the side was a very small park.

Several dozen people were standing in this park, in the shade of some trees, watching him with rather complex expressions. They were somewhat afraid, somewhat uneasy.

Suddenly, an extremely dim and stealthy sword glow pierced through a basket one of them was holding and stabbed towards Xiao Zhang.

This was an unthinkable angle of attack, a most sinister strike.

Yet Xiao Zhang seemed long-prepared. Grunting, he stabbed his spear through the air, accurately striking the sword glow with a fierce momentum.

The sword glow instantly shattered into pieces, the assassin hidden in the crowd forced to retreat in a wretched state, slamming against a tree.

Leaves drifted onto the assassin's body and were swiftly dyed red by vomited blood.

The assassin's face was brimming with fright. He wanted to stand and flee, but he could no longer muster the strength.

Surprisingly, Xiao Zhang only glanced at the assassin before continuing up the steps.

Chen Changsheng's group had already left the tea house and were now standing at the back of the crowd.

Seeing this scene, Tang Thirty-Six praised, "An excellent technique."

During the night of the coup of the Mausoleum of Books and the period that followed, Xiao Zhang had been a very intractable foe

for the Orthodoxy to deal with, but things were different after he rescued Wang Po from the shores of the Luo River. At least in Tang Thirty-Six's view, this expert who should have been at the top of the Proclamation of Liberation was a powerful ally that they had to contend for, so he naturally had a favorable view of him.

However, Hu Thirty-Two and Zhexiu shook their heads at Tang Thirty-Six's praise. It was clear that they held different views.

"His wounds are too severe. Even more severe than we imagined," Chen Changsheng said worriedly.

Tang Thirty-Six understood.

Based on Xiao Zhang's violent style of fighting, if he still had sixty or seventy percent of his fighting capability, even an assassin from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets would have died to a single attack, their bones shattered.

Even if they managed to live by some fluke, Xiao Zhang's personality guaranteed that another strike would come, making sure of their death.

But the assassin was still alive.

This could only mean that Xiao Zhang's injuries were more serious than imagined, so serious that he was not even willing to expend the energy for another strike of his spear.

As expected.

Several experts of the Imperial Court used the restlessness of the crowd to attack Xiao Zhang.

Xiao Zhang had successfully forced back those experts, but his body was beginning to sway, ready to fall at any moment.

"There are new injuries, and even more old wounds."

Like Xiao Zhang, Zhexiu regarded battle as a way of life. His eyes had clearly picked out just where Xiao Zhang's problems lay.

After being pursued by the Imperial Court for three years,

fighting endlessly without a moment for rest, even if Xiao Zhang's body really was forged from steel, he would still feel tired.

Once he was tired, his reaction speed would slow, making it easier for him to be injured.

Once he started getting injured, he would continue suffering more and more injuries. His true essence would dry up. He would become unbearably exhausted, and finally be powerless to fight back.

He was a peak Star Condensation expert of the Proclamation of Liberation, and it was rare for him to find someone that was a match for him beneath the Divine. He was like some giant beast roaming the wastelands alone. Unable to counterattack, he was pursued by those scavenging vultures that were the experts of the Imperial Court for so many days, forced to fight over his long journey. A day would eventually come when his body crashed onto the ground.

Xiao Zhang finally reached the highest point of Fengyang City.

He stood in front of the Seven Treasures Stronghold. Looking down at the river below, he squinted his eyes.

The morning sun had already risen over the mountains. Its blazing rays shone over the river and mountains, the gleam rather dazzling.

He could clearly see that the experts of the Imperial Court and the divine crossbowmen had already encircled Fengyang City.

Although his mind was still in order, he was somewhat annoyed, like he had seen a swarm of houseflies that he couldn't disperse.

A person like Xiao Zhang truly might consider himself like a giant beast that stalked the wasteland alone, but he would never admit that these Imperial Court experts that had pursued him for several years were vultures. In his eyes, these fellows were vexing flies and mosquitoes, buzzing by his ear every day, making it

difficult for him to sleep, which was why he now felt so drowsy.

Yes, he was just somewhat drowsy.

He felt like all he needed was some sleep, as why else would his eyelids be so heavy, his lips so numb, his pursuers have caught up to him?

He felt drowsier and drowsier, his eyelids heavier and heavier. Even he found it difficult to distinguish whether his eyes were squinting or already closed.

The morning sun shone over Fengyang City, and also on his face.

He swayed twice, then fell to the floor.

But he did not roll down the steps.

With a thump, the end of his spear jabbed into the ground. At the most dangerous moment, it helped support his fatigued body.

At this sight, those people who had never forgotten all the good Xiao Zhang had done for Fengyang City could no longer bear to look, and turned around. But some people stood up.

The first to stand up was a tea merchant of Fengyang City, as well as ten-some shop assistants who worked in the tea business.

"Protect Master Xiao!"

The tea merchant grit his teeth and shouted, then brought those shop assistants up the stone steps to Seven Treasures Stronghold and stood in front of Xiao Zhang. Some of them took out the swords that they usually kept on their person for protection, but even more used carrying poles that were usually meant for transporting goods, pointing them at those approaching experts.

As a tea merchant, one would inevitably encounter some troubles while doing business and would inevitably get into conflict with other tea merchants in Fengyang City. This tea merchant was known for his fierce temper, and the shop assistants under him were also extremely valiant with quite some reputation in the city,

but how could they alone stop these experts and divine crossbowmen of the Imperial Court?

But soon after, more tea merchants and common people joined them.

The stone steps of the Seven Treasures Stronghold were quickly packed with people.

The specific term for 'porter' used here is '棒棒儿', which is a slang term specific to Chongqing. They are so called because they are usually seen with carrying poles/sticks, called '棒棒' by the locals.

Chapter 865 – The Visible Trajectory of a Claw

Xiao Zhang somewhat arduously opened his eyes. Seeing the tense expressions on the faces of the ordinary people by his side, he felt rather strange.

In the eyes of cultivators, he was just a battle maniac. They feared him, but when had there ever been anyone who revered and wanted to protect him?

Back then, he had only said that the winter wild tea of Fengyang City was good because he truly felt that it was countless times better than the Great Crimson Gown that Liang Wangsun liked to drink. When had he ever thought about the benefits it would bring to the inhabitants of this remote city?

But now these ordinary people that he would normally find himself too lazy to even glance at were now standing in front of him. Even though they were well aware that they might die, and their hands trembled, they refused to leave.

Suddenly, he felt that other than those battles that he had taken extreme pleasure in, there had also been a few other things he had done in his life that could be considered fulfilling.

For instance, he had saved Wang Po from the Luo River in that snowstorm, and he had also given a few words of praise for the winter wild tea grown in this small city.

.....

.....

The simple but fierce nature of Fengyang was amply displayed at this moment.

The men packing the steps in front of the Seven Treasures Stronghold and the constantly shouting crowd on the outskirts

were all proof.

But the experts and divine crossbowmen of the Imperial Court remained unmoved.

The expressions of those blue-clothed Daoists were completely devoid of emotion.

In their eyes, both Xiao Zhang and these people of Fengyang City were no different from corpses.

The Daoists ascended the steps.

In a few short moments, rivers of blood would flow and many people would die in Fengyang City.

The blue-clothed Daoists didn't care. No matter how many people died, it could all be explained away with the words 'mass uprising'.

The greatest tragedy would naturally befall those people soon to die and the supervising official.

The supervising official of the county city of Fengyang was naturally the county magistrate. To his great fortune, in order to prepare for tomorrow's winter wild tea party, the provincial magistrate from Feng City had already arrived.

No matter what happened today, the one who had to bear the responsibility in the end was, by all rights, the provincial magistrate.

This magistrate naturally could not allow those rivers of blood to flow.

The magistrate from Feng City was middle-aged with a lean face. His temples were speckled with white, and he had quite the dignified aura.

He cupped his hands and bowed to the Daoists. "Esteemed Daoists, please wait for a moment."

Those blue-clothed Daoists probably knew that he was the Prince of Xiang's pupil. His words caused them to stop, though their

expressions remained apathetic.

"You fools just want to show a moment of bravery, but all you will end up doing is committing injustice against the old and young of my Fengyang City!"

The magistrate looked at the tea merchants and common people on the stone steps, his expression harsh as he rebuked, "Just who is the Xiao Zhang that you are protecting? A madman who can kill people in the blink of an eye! Could a person like him truly mean any goodwill to you? Back then, he was just speaking carelessly. What need is there to give your life to protect him?"

A person yelled out from the crowd, "Right now, our tea is selling so well, everyone is profiting; should we not be thanking him?"

The magistrate sternly reproved, "The reason my Fengyang City's wild tea sells so well is that the Imperial Court built a dock, allowing merchant ships to come, and even took the tea as tribute. If you need someone to thank, you should be thanking the Imperial Court, and not this criminal wanted by the Imperial Court!"

The surrounding crowd grew restless, and then began to chatter amongst themselves. Although they did not disperse, they were no longer as tense as before.

Xiao Zhang squinted his eyes. Looking at the magistrate, he said, "Your skill in flapping your lips is rather good."

With a firm expression, the magistrate said, "You can't threaten this official—I'm not afraid of you. If you don't want to hear my words, just kill me."

Xiao Zhang said, "In the past, you would be dead by now."

The magistrate stared at the white paper on his face and rebuked, "So what if I die? I leave this world with a clear conscience. To die while speaking for the people is a worthy death, but you are just a criminal wanted by the court that only knows how to bully the weak and slaughter the innocent! Truly wicked beyond

redemption, not even ten thousand deaths would atone for your crimes!"

.....

.....

"Xiao Zhang has a violent temper, and quite a few cultivation experts have died at his hand. He truly can't be considered a good person, but bullying the weak and slaughtering the innocent... these aren't things that he would do, would be willing to do. He would consider it beneath himself."

In the crowd, Hu Thirty-Two whispered to Chen Changsheng.

Today, many experts of the Imperial Court and divine crossbowmen had come to Fengyang City, but most important of all were the blue-clothed Daoists.

If things continued as expected, Xiao Zhang really might die.

Hu Thirty-Two was whispering to Chen Changsheng and examining his expression because he wanted to know just what the Pope was thinking.

At the moment, the only thing that could change the situation was Chen Changsheng's party.

At this moment, Hu Thirty-Two suddenly realized that Zhexiu, who had been near the Pope all this time, was no longer around.

"You don't understand us, or else you wouldn't have said that, let alone looked at his eyes while talking."

Tang Thirty-Six pointed out, "You see, Zhexiu left without needing to look at his eyes."

Hu Thirty-Two was at first somewhat confused, but then he heard the shrill whistle over the stone steps.

.....

.....

The Imperial Court had pursued Xiao Zhang for three years now. The pursuers were constantly being swapped, but besides the assassins of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets hidden in the shadows, their primary strength still originated from the Ministry of Justice.

Several experts from the Ministry of Justice dispersed the crowd and blocked Xiao Zhang's avenues of retreat. They then unwound the chains from their bodies and cast them towards Xiao Zhang.

Compared to the six government laborers of the Tang clan's Fivekind Man, the experts of the Ministry of Justice threw the chains with a far inferior skill and a far less sinister Qi, but one could faintly see the similarity in power.

Xiao Zhang could barely stand steady, so he certainly had no ability to dodge these chains.

Since he couldn't dodge, he decided not to dodge.

That he was incapable of dodging did not mean that he was incapable of fighting.

He closed his eyes, thinking about which technique he would use to kill one of those blue-clothed Daoists, after which he would jump into the river.

Even if he died, he wanted to die in a way appropriate to his name, in a somewhat unbridled fashion.

But he did not sense those cold and heavy chains wrapping around his neck, only heard a noisy din.

This din was clearly caused by the clashing of metal, but it was also a clear-cut sound, like the metal was being snapped.

He opened his eyes and was greeted by bits of metal flying about in the light, an unexpectedly beautiful sight.

In the depths of those shattered shards of metal were the tracks left behind by some incredibly sharp weapon, but no weapon could

be seen.

The blue-clothed Daoists saw the chains in the hands of those experts from the Ministry of Justice snapping. Their pupils constricted, and they shot up the stone steps.

They paid no attention to the fierce Qi that had shattered those chains. Their goal was clear: 'Kill Xiao Zhang'.

Several extremely gloomy sword glows stabbed at Xiao Zhang from the most bizarre of angles.

These Daoists were from Luoyang's Monastery of Eternal Spring, and they cultivated the traditional Daoist methods of the Orthodoxy. From a certain perspective, they were Chen Changsheng's fellow disciples. However, perhaps because the Monastery of Eternal Spring had spent too much time in the darkness of history, their sword techniques were stranger and more unfathomable.

But their swords were still unable to stab Xiao Zhang to death.

Another din of clashing metal rose up over the stone steps.

Several extremely deep and invisible marks tore through the morning light, leaving behind a blurred shape in the air that looked just like a wolf claw.

Chapter 866 – I Can Stand a Little Higher

The dust settled and Zhexiu's figure appeared in front of Xiao Zhang.

He wore only a single layer of clothing, and his sleeves and pants had been cut very short, so it was impossible to conceal those needle-like hairs sprouting from his skin.

His fingers were tipped by ten incredibly sharp and tough claws. They gleamed with a cold light that caused onlookers to tremble in fear.

Even more frightening was that his face was also covered in fur, his teeth as sharp as his claws, his eyes overtaken by a bloody red.

At this sight, the crowd exploded in cries of horror, receding like a tide as everyone fled for their lives.

Zhexiu cared not for these things. His eyes remained fixed on those blue-clothed Daoists.

These blue-clothed Daoists were very powerful, and even more terrifying was that they were very dangerous.

Power did not necessarily mean danger. No one understood this principle more than Zhexiu.

So he chose without hesitation to use berserk metamorphosis at the first moment, confronting these foes in his most powerful state.

.....

.....

Several Dao swords buzzed, vibrating at high speeds beneath the morning light.

The blue-clothed Daoists looked at Zhexiu and slightly frowned. They did not say anything, nor did they attack.

Although Zhexiu had grown up fighting on the snowy plains on the northern frontier, he had always had a famous reputation in the central region of the Great Zhou.

The Daoists only needed a glance to recognize the young expert from the Wolf tribe.

Wofu Zhexiu was the most dangerous expert of the younger generation.

This was a publicly acknowledged fact, although it had been quite a few years since he had displayed that terrifying experience and perseverance in a battle.

If Zhexiu insisted on protecting Xiao Zhang, today would assuredly become a bitter battle, even a bloody one.

But the blue-clothed Daoists were only wary of him, not afraid.

They very coolly concluded that Zhexiu could not alter the final conclusion, that Xiao Zhang would still die.

They had stopped not because of Zhexiu's sudden appearance, but because they knew just where Zhexiu had gone after leaving the snowy plains, just who had been with him the entire time.

As expected, the crowd below them parted to the sides like a tide.

Chen Changsheng ascended the stone steps.

All of Fengyang City became absolutely silent.

No one here recognized Chen Changsheng, but all the subjects of the Great Zhou were believers of the Orthodoxy, so which one of them could fail to recognize the Divine Staff in his hands?

Just who in the continent had the right to wield the Divine Staff?

Finally, someone came to their senses, letting out a gasp that caused all of Fengyang City to wake from its stupor.

Still like a tide, the masses kneeled on the ground and prostrated to Chen Changsheng, their countless pious and reverent voices

combining together, transforming into a thunderous boom.

"Paying respects to His Holiness the Pope."

Chen Changsheng came to Zhexiu's side, then turned to face the blue-clothed Daoists.

The Daoists also prostrated to Chen Changsheng, their expressions reverent, no unwillingness on their faces.

Chen Changsheng nodded.

The officials and experts from the Ministry of Justice also prostrated.

Chen Changsheng turned to Xiao Zhang. As he saw that shabby sheet of white paper, he recalled their first meeting in Xunyang City, and couldn't help but feel somewhat melancholic.

Even now, he did not even glance at the magistrate.

The magistrate's complexion fluctuated for a few moments, but he finally raised the front of his official's gown and prostrated.

Xiao Zhang did not kneel, as he didn't have the strength. Of course, even if he were brimming with strength, he would not kneel to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng had been the Pope for three years now. His prestige on the continent had risen higher and higher, especially with his recent reappearance and the matter of the Cinnabar Pill.

In Xiao Zhang's eyes, he was still that talented youth with a tough-enough personality that he met in Xunyang City, but also just as boring and uninteresting as Wang Po.

In brief, he saw Chen Changsheng as a junior, so why should he kneel?

Xiao Zhang asked, "How did you turn up here?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "I just happened to be passing by."

This was naturally an excuse. Nobody would believe it.

Xiao Zhang asked, "What do you want to do?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "I want to pardon your crimes."

After saying this, he raised the Divine Staff.

All that was needed now was for Xiao Zhang to kneel, and then he would use the top end of the Divine Staff to lightly touch Xiao Zhang's head thrice, and the pardoning ceremony would be complete.

"Hold!" The magistrate suppressed the fear in his heart and asked in a trembling voice, "When was the Li Palace able to involve itself in matters of the court?"

According to the laws of the Great Zhou and a few old and unwritten rules, the Li Palace normally did not involve itself in political affairs.

Chen Changsheng finally glanced at the magistrate, but still he did not speak to him.

"According to the Memorial on Punishment of the Great Zhou Laws, other than for crimes of treason, His Holiness the Pope has the right of special pardon."

Hu Thirty-Two had at some point arrived on the scene. He gave the magistrate an impassive look and said, "Just what rank did you get in the Grand Examination that you don't even know this?"

The magistrate's face turned abnormally unsightly. He was familiar with the laws of both the church and the Great Zhou, and so he naturally knew that the Pope had the right of special pardon. However, the previous Pope had never used it once in his centuries of rule, so let alone him, even the dukes of the court had probably forgotten about it.

Those words he had said earlier had carried such force and vigor that they had seemed to make a sound when they struck the ground, and even now seemed to be echoing.

"You slaughter innocents. Not even ten thousand deaths would atone for your crimes.

"Thus, you are wicked beyond redemption."

But not long after he had said those words, the Pope appeared and said that he wanted to pardon Xiao Zhang's crimes.

This was the special right of the Pope. 'Even if ten thousand deaths would not atone for your crimes, even if you are wicked beyond redemption, if I want to pardon you, you are free of sin.'

Tang Thirty-Six had also arrived. Pointing at those blue-clothed Daoists, he said, "If the Orthodoxy cannot involve itself in matters of the court, why do these Daoists of the Monastery of Eternal Spring dare to kill someone on the street? My lord magistrate, shouldn't you have these people arrested and sent to prison first?"

The blue-clothed Daoists appeared unaffected, but the magistrate's complexion continued to worsen.

At this moment, Xiao Zhang suddenly said, "I certainly won't kneel to you."

If he refused to kneel, how could the ceremony of pardon be completed?

No one could have expected that just as the matter seemed about to resolve itself, a new problem would appear.

Tang Thirty-Six was prepared to say a few harsh words to Xiao Zhang, but was stopped by Chen Changsheng.

"I can just stand a little higher."

Chen Changsheng walked up a few steps, then turned around.

He was now a few steps higher than Xiao Zhang, at just the right height.

Without any need for Xiao Zhang to kneel, he could raise the Divine Staff, stretch it level like a ruler and touch Xiao Zhang's head.

Without any sound, the tip of the Divine Staff lightly touched Xiao Zhang's head thrice, completing the ceremony.

From start to finish, Xiao Zhang said nothing, and no one could see what his expression was beneath the white paper. Was he astonished or furious?

After a while, he rubbed his head and said, "A little itchy."

Chapter 867 – Part of a Sight That Others Can Only Watch from a Distance

The people of Fengyang City continued to kneel on both sides of the street, a dense and silent crowd.

"Disperse. I presume that everyone has many things that they need to do to make a living," Chen Changsheng said.

After passing through that small village at the base of Mount Han, he had gained experience in accepting the prostration of the masses, but he was still somewhat unaccustomed to it.

To put it another way, 'unaccustomed' meant bashful or shy, so his voice was somewhat soft, making it impossible for many people to hear.

"Quickly disperse! Those who need to open their businesses should open their businesses, those who need to go to work should go to work, and those who need to go to school should go to school!"

Tang Thirty-Six shouted at the crowd.

His voice was very loud, his expression natural. It was like he was the one that was Pope.

Naturally, no one listened to him.

Very quickly, the magistrate of Fengyang County ordered his troops to maintain order.

The people lining the streets stood up but didn't leave. They stared at Chen Changsheng, their faces showing all sorts of emotions: respect, piety, passion, excitement, and many more.

To the people of this remote city, this was probably the only chance they would ever have to personally lay eyes on the Pope, so how could they so easily leave?

The priests of Fengyang City's church also hurried over, but they were not very different from ordinary believers. Upon seeing Chen Changsheng, they became so nervous that they couldn't speak. Their Daoist robes instantly became soaked in sweat and their legs went even softer than Xiao Zhang's. To wit, they were useless.

The blue-clothed Daoists and experts of the Imperial Court also did not leave.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at them and said, "What? Are you really thinking about assassinating the Pope in front of tens of thousands of people, thereby succeeding in causing the stupidest and bravest situation of all time?"

Such harsh jeering and coarse words actually had some effect, because the target of their criticism was so clear that everyone could understand.

Countless furious gazes fell on the Daoists and experts of the Imperial Court, and those officials also failed to escape.

The officials and experts retreated far away while the crossbowmen disarmed their crossbows so as to avoid any disrespect.

The blue-clothed Daoists stood ten-some zhang away, but they did not seem ready to leave.

Chen Changsheng took out a few pills.

Hu Thirty-Two went into the Seven Treasures Stronghold to ask for a bowl of water.

Xiao Zhang used this bowl of water to drink the handful of pills.

Chen Changsheng hesitated for a moment, then said, "Those pills were meant to be taken over three days."

At these words, the paper over Xiao Zhang's face flapped.

"There's no wind; is that just from breathing? As expected from an expert of the Proclamation of Liberation, his anger causes such

turmoil."

Tang Thirty-Six very seriously commented.

He wouldn't have been afraid of Xiao Zhang in the past, let alone now.

His three years of imprisonment in the old estate and the ancestral hall, especially that half-year at the end, had truly stifled his voice too fiercely.

At some point, the similarity of the Tang clan's young master to Su Li had spread around the continent. Xiao Zhang knew that little advantage could be gained from quarreling with this fellow and decided to ignore it. He said to Chen Changsheng, "Don't hope that I'll sell my life to the Li Palace."

"A thing like one's life naturally can't be sold," Chen Changsheng agreed.

On the side, Tang Thirty-Six said, "Who said you can't sell a life? Have you ever thought about how my idol makes his living? How did I play that final hand in the ancestral hall?"

Chen Changsheng looked at him, saying nothing.

Tang Thirty-Six waved his hand, indicating that he understood and would stop saying whatever came to mind.

Chen Changsheng looked at the nearby Daoist and said, "Whether one is guilty or not all depends on a single sentence from the Imperial Court. I can pardon all the hollow crimes they charged you with, but they can charge you with new crimes at any time and keep up their endless pursuit."

Xiao Zhang said, "When I struck with my spear on the Luo River, I didn't think of this much, so there's no need for me to think of it now."

"Your wounds are too heavy and numerous. You need to recuperate, so I want to arrange a place for you to hide away for

some time."

Chen Changsheng added, "I'm not Wang Po. There are no grudges or affections between us, so there's no need for you to reject my good intentions."

Xiao Zhang was quiet for a while, then said, "In fact, I had also thought of finding a place to hide away."

After being pursued by the Imperial Court for three whole years, how could he not feel exhausted? No matter how unbridled he was, he also knew that this could not continue.

Not long ago, after being heavily wounded, he truly did want to find a place to rest, but such a place was quite difficult to find.

There were very few sects that were both daring enough and able to defy Shang Xingzhou's majesty.

He had old grudges with the Mount Li Sword Sect and Scholartree Manor, and was not willing to lower his head to them, even if his refusal resulted in his death.

The place he ultimately chose was the same place Chen Changsheng had intended to bring him.

Holy Maiden Peak.

Hearing Xiao Zhang's words, Chen Changsheng's party was shocked. Since he had already gone to Holy Maiden Peak, why had the Imperial Court chased him here?

"I wasn't able to enter Holy Maiden Peak."

Xiao Zhang's eyes pierced through the holes in the paper, turning somewhat dark, perhaps because he was recalling the circumstances of that day.

"The sword array formed by those girls is truly difficult to deal with, and since they clearly didn't want me, should I implore them to let me in?"

Chen Changsheng felt this very strange. After the battle of the

Luo River, the Imperial Court began to pursue Xiao Zhang. Everyone knew what the Li Palace's position on Xiao Zhang was. Even if Xu Yourong was in seclusion, South Stream Temple was masterless, and the people in the temple did not like Xiao Zhang's way of doing things, was there a need for such an unyielding stance?

As he thought of these questions, his eyes met Xiao Zhang's.

He suddenly understood that Xiao Zhang was telling him that something might have happened in South Stream Temple.

"When leaving South Stream Temple, I encountered a party from the Imperial Court and quickly avoided it."

"Why?"

"Because there were two sedan chairs in that party. I don't know who was in them, but they were far stronger than me."

Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six glanced at each other, knowing the answer.

"The Prince of Xiang and Wuqiong Bi... Where were they going?"

"It wasn't clear. Afterward, I was ambushed by some monster. Because I was driving out its poison, my old injuries broke out, and then these houseflies came chasing after me. It was very annoying, so I wanted to come here and drink some tea."

Drinking tea could truly calm one's mind, but Chen Changsheng's party knew that Xiao Zhang must have thought he did not have long to live and so wanted to come here and drink some tea.

Both involved drinking tea, but the reason and frame of mind were different.

Chen Changsheng had a vague guess as to who that monster was.

To poison a person like Xiao Zhang, who else could it be?

"Have you been eating well lately?" Chen Changsheng asked.

Xiao Zhang replied, "I can eat my fill, but I'm not eating well."

Having to watch for an ambush at any moment, always looking out for poison—anyone would find it difficult to savor one's food this way.

There was a restaurant in the Seven Treasures Stronghold, so they found a private room to sit in. In a short while, they began to partake of a sumptuous banquet.

Chen Changsheng was also eating, so there was naturally no one who dared to poison the food.

Xiao Zhang paid no attention to anyone else. His chopsticks descended like the wind, swiftly emptying the plates of their delicacies.

He didn't drink alcohol, but he did drink half a pot of winter wild tea.

To be able to eat in such a relaxed fashion was already a very extravagant matter for him.

After eating and drinking to his heart's content, Xiao Zhang became too relaxed and fell asleep at the table, his snores seemingly echoing throughout the entire city.

Chen Changsheng's party quietly watched him, none of them saying a single word.

Outside the restaurant, countless people were also watching him, none of them saying a single word.

Chapter 868 – The Breeze over the River Is Cool

A normal person would probably encounter problems if they consumed three days' worth of medicine in one go.

Xiao Zhang would not encounter any problems, as his recovery abilities were incredibly powerful.

After sweetly sleeping for an hour, he woke up and said, "I have enough energy."

Chen Changsheng asked, "You really don't want to travel with us?"

"Since we don't follow the same path, there's no need to travel together."

Xiao Zhang took the box containing rations and medicine from Chen Changsheng, gripped his spear, and walked out.

He did not immediately leave, but first went to the treasure pavilion at the very top of the Seven Treasures Stronghold and took the box of tea.

He then turned to those blue-clothed Daoists and Imperial Court experts and said, "Come, continue."

.....

.....

Xiao Zhang left, as did the Daoists, experts, and divine crossbowmen.

Chen Changsheng's party naturally had to leave as well.

The people of Fengyang City lining the street had not left.

They prostrated to Chen Changsheng, offering their pious respects. Even many elders that found it difficult to walk had been brought to the street by their relatives in the hopes that they might

obtain the Pope's blessing.

At any other time, Chen Changsheng would have spent some time in Fengyang City, treating the illnesses of the faithful or conducting a small ceremony to the light in the manner described in the scriptures of the church.

But right now, he did not have the time, as he had to leave. Fortunately, Hu Thirty-Two had already sent a message to the nearby Daoist church, which had made the appropriate preparations to distribute medicine.

Based on Chen Changsheng's request, two clerics skilled in the Sacred Light technique would also be coming.

"May the Sacred Light be with all of you."

Chen Changsheng said to the people of Fengyang City.

The masses once more prostrated, once more like a tide.

Leaving Fengyang City, traversing the chain across the river, they came to a sparsely inhabited area of the canyon.

Recalling what he had just witnessed, Tang Thirty-Six said, "Only just now did I feel that you really are the Pope."

The Pope was divine and would assuredly obtain the respect of countless believers, but true love and respect were not so easy to gain.

Normally, this needed the accumulation of time and prestige.

Chen Changsheng had only become the Pope three years ago. In such a small and remote place like Fengyang City, if the Daoist church did not exert itself in announcing his presence, many believers might not even know he had come.

He was able to obtain the heartfelt respect and love of so many believers largely because An Hua had announced the matter of the Cinnabar Pill. The Orthodoxy's praising of the divine had turned out to be very effective.

Chen Changsheng did not want to talk about these things, so he changed the subject. "The monster that Xiao Zhang encountered was probably Chusu."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Perhaps. If Xiao Zhang hadn't been heavily wounded, he couldn't possibly have been ambushed."

Zhexiu said, "Not necessarily. Chusu was also injured in Wenshui City, so don't go out alone."

Tang Thirty-Six understood his meaning and asked in surprise, "Is that monster really this troublesome?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "It truly is very troublesome."

As he said this, a faint tinge of worry could be seen on his face.

It was not due to Chusu, but to the other matter that Xiao Zhang mentioned: there might be some problem at Holy Maiden Peak.

Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu were aware of what he was worried about. After leaving Fengyang City, they traveled much faster than they had before.

But Chen Changsheng did not think it was fast enough.

If South Stream Temple really had encountered some sort of mishap, she was in seclusion at Holy Maiden Peak, so could she be in danger?

As they swiftly traveled several dozen li along the canyon, Fengyang City quickly faded from view, and the number of boats on the river decreased substantially.

Chen Changsheng brought Nanke out of the Garden of Zhou, and then looked at Zhexiu and the others.

Tang Thirty-Six felt a little conflicted. "Why do I feel like I've become a cat?"

Zhexiu asked, "Have you ever seen a cat cage as large as the Garden of Zhou?"

Hu Thirty-Two humbly said, "To be able to stay in His Holiness's miniature world for a time is a grand blessing."

Zhexiu creased his brow.

Tang Thirty-Six sighed and said, "Too much."

Chen Changsheng urged, "Hurry."

Nanke watched as they were sent into the Garden of Zhou, then asked, "Chen Changsheng, where are we going?"

She could remember Chen Changsheng's name now, but she still didn't know who she was, was still as ignorant as a little child.

"We're going to Holy Maiden Peak." Chen Changsheng unfurled a map and pointed out which direction she should go.

Nanke's eyes remained dull, so it was hard to tell if she had understood the map. She asked, "How fast?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "As fast as you can go. Of course, don't injure yourself."

Nanke replied, "I understand."

She then grabbed Chen Changsheng's neck and jumped off the cliff towards the river.

The wind over the river was somewhat chilly. As it howled against his face, Chen Changsheng cooled down somewhat.

And then, he saw the approaching river and found it impossible to calm down.

Only now did he remember that after that bloody battle in the mountains, Nanke's two wings had vanished, so how could she fly?

A hint of confusion had also appeared in Nanke's dull eyes.

She knew that she could fly, so she had instinctively jumped into the air without any fear or hesitation.

But just how exactly did she fly?

Nanke used her lightning-fast movement techniques to blink around the air in an astonishing fashion, but she could not stop her descent.

The two began to fall faster and faster, the river getting closer and closer.

She closed her eyes.

Chen Changsheng sighed and thought, without Zhizhi, what method should I use to dry these drenched clothes?

Just when they were about to fall into the river, two noises erupted from Nanke's back.

Those sounds were like the sound that the white paper on Xiao Zhang's face made in Xunyang City.

Not Fengyang City, but Xunyang City, because it was in Xunyang City when the white paper on his face had been whole.

It was somewhat like a sail unfurling as quickly as possible.

Of course, it was most similar to wings unfurling.

Dark green wings of ten-some zhang in length unfurled behind Nanke, carrying her over the rapids of the river and up into the sky.

Chen Changsheng had been even closer to the river, the bottom of his shoes even touching the water, leaving a ripple behind.

From a distance, it looked like a dragonfly lightly touching the water.

.....

.....

Pope Chen Changsheng had left Fengyang City, but the people of this small city found it very difficult to take their leave.

In a restaurant along the river, a young master looked at the crowd that was still gazing up the river, and a hint of annoyance

appeared on his face.

"Truly a bunch of ignorant fools."

A delicate girl walked over. It was Mu Jiushi.

The young master was Bie Tianxin.

Seeing Mu Jiushi, Bie Tianxin instantly changed his expression, harmoniously saying, "The wind from the river is rather strong. Be careful."

When Mu Jiushi was banished from the Li Palace, her cultivation in the Orthodoxy's techniques had been destroyed, but her strength that originated from the Great Western Continent was still there, so there was no need for her to care about any wind off the river.

Bie Tianxin only wanted to express his concern.

Mu Jiushi faintly smiled, very naturally accepting his concern and standing a little closer to him.

Chapter 869 – I Will Wait for You in the Abyss

From Hanqiu City to Fengyang City, this young couple had traveled together. Although they were not as close as normal lovers, their expressions and movements were much more natural.

Mu Jiushi stood at Bie Tianxin's side, very naturally leaning into his chest.

Even though this sight had occurred several times, Bie Tianxin was still very excited, his heart immediately beginning to beat faster.

Mu Jiushi gave a naughty smile, apparently finding his attitude very amusing. She extended a pure white hand and pressed it against his chest.

Beneath her palm was his heart.

Bie Tianxin naturally would not care about her action, but soon after, his expression turned abnormally grave.

A stranger dressed in blue clothes and wearing a copper mask had inexplicably appeared in the room.

Upon seeing this blue-clothed stranger, Bie Tianxin narrowed his eyes.

Who was this person that they were able to noiselessly enter this room without alerting him or Mu Jiushi?

The stranger did not release any sort of Qi, but Bie Tianxin had already faintly guessed at their cultivation, and he felt his lips moisten.

He was only in the Star Condensation Realm, but his parents were experts of the Divine Domain, so he had experienced far more than his peers.

When traveling the world, Bie Tianxin had never worried about his safety, because no one had ever dared to show him the slightest disrespect.

If there was anyone in this world who would dare risk the fury of two Divine Domain experts by attacking him, it could only be another expert of the Divine Domain.

Bie Tianxin did not know who the blue-clothed stranger was or why the stranger had come to find him, but he sensed incredible danger.

"Quickly leave. Don't worry about me."

Bie Tianxin stared at the stranger while he spoke to Mu Jiushi.

Mu Jiushi's petite face revealed a somewhat strange expression, a smile and yet not a smile, apparently moved yet also derisive.

But she did not leave, nor did she ask anything. She didn't even take her hand off his chest.

Bie Tianxin felt this to be rather strange, but all his attention was currently focused on the blue-clothed stranger. He had no time to think about this detail, and he still had a very important thing to do.

After all, he was the son of Wuqiong Bi and Bie Yanghong. Although he did not reach Luoluo's absurd level, he naturally carried several powerful magical artifacts on his person in his travels.

For instance, such a magical artifact was currently concealed in his sleeve. This magical artifact could not defeat a Divine Domain expert, but it could create a divine enchantment that could let him endure for a while, and when this magical artifact activated, his parents would sense it, no matter how far away they were.

This was also the reason he could remain composed and have Mu Jiushi leave first.

But he soon found it impossible to remain composed, and his complexion swiftly paled. He discovered that there was something wrong with the magical artifact in his sleeve.

An indistinct yet unbreakable Qi had appeared around the restaurant, presumably laid down by the blue-clothed stranger. It prevented any signal from getting out.

But what of the magical artifact? Why had it failed at the most crucial moment?

He looked toward Mu Jiushi on his chest, sensed that the palm on his chest was getting colder and colder. He vaguely guessed what had happened, and his eyes showed pain and disbelief.

"Why?"

This was the question that Bie Tianxin most wanted to know the answer to.

Mu Jiushi raised her face to him and naughtily stuck out her tongue. Laughing, she said, "Because I've never liked you."

Bie Tianxin heard the answer, but he still found it impossible to believe. His body trembled in anger and sorrow as he shakily said, "Is that so?"

"I never allowed you to tell anyone else, including your parents, precisely because I never thought about being together with you."

Mu Jiushi straightened her body, her delicate palm still tightly pressed to his chest, seemingly unable to part with his warmth.

"So that your pitiful self can die with some understanding, your journey to Hanqiu City was precisely so that you could meet Chen Changsheng, after which we could kill you. However, certain matters made it inconvenient for us to move, which is why we've delayed it until now. In truth, if you carefully thought about it, you would have known this was a trap. You're just too stupid."

She jeered, "What right do you have to marry me? I'm someone

that's going to be the Pope."

Seeing the expression on her face, Bie Tianxin shook off his earlier fear and unease, leaving only pain and anger. He muttered, "So you originally schemed to plant the crime on Chen Changsheng and make the continent fall into endless turmoil. Presumably all this is your Mu clan's plot, and now that I think of it, Madam Mu going to White Emperor City back then was also problematic."

Mu Jiushi did not expect that on the verge of death, the hedonistic young master she so disdained would become much calmer and wiser, and she couldn't help but be a little flabbergasted.

But matters had already reached this point, and things were already past the point of no return.

"Of course, just what sort of person is my older sister? She was the most intelligent genius of my clan! How could she possibly be forced off the Great Western Continent just because of the throne?"

Mu Jiushi calmly said to him, "My sister's husband is the hero of a generation, but even he ultimately could not overcome the beauty of a woman and ended up being deceived by her for so many years. Although you're far inferior to my sister's husband, you don't seem so bad now. Please calmly die. I promise you that I won't forget how well you treated me in our time together."

Bie Tianxin stared into her eyes. "You want to frame Chen Changsheng, but no one will believe you."

Mu Jiushi lightly said, "Everyone knows that you were killed by the Black Dragon."

Immediately, her small hand released an extremely pure and cold Qi.

Bie Tianxin's body was instantly frozen, making it impossible for him to move.

He noticed that her eyes had become abnormally deep and serene, like a cold pool.

He understood what Mu Jiushi intended to do, and how she intended to frame Chen Changsheng.

Mu Jiushi calmly looked at him as cold energy continued to pour out of her palm.

Bie Tianxin's mind and body were cold, perhaps because of this cold Qi, or perhaps because of her cruelty and lack of emotion.

Frost covered his eyelashes. They looked like the fringes of ice covering the trees of the north, rather pleasant, but also somewhat tragic.

He stared at Mu Jiushi's face, as if wanting to forever remember that beautiful, pure, yet absolutely malicious face.

"I will not go to the sea of stars. I will soon go to the abyss, where I will never forget you. There, I will await your arrival."

These were Bie Tianxin's final words.

After saying this, he closed his eyes and stopped breathing.

His Ethereal Palace, star openings, meridians, blood, and flesh had all been frozen into crystal by the supreme cold, all of it devoid of life.

After some time, Mu Jiushi finally took her palm off his chest.

She gazed in silence at the ice sculpture that was Bie Tianxin for a very long time, her face somewhat pale.

Was it because the bitterly cold Qi had caused her to consume too much true essence, or was it because of Bie Tianxin's final words?

Chapter 870 – The Secret Sinking into the Depths of the River

"Quickly."

The taciturn blue-clothed stranger suddenly spoke. "Wuqiong Bi has assuredly sensed that his life has been extinguished."

As experts of the Divine Domain, Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi had assuredly left an imprint on their son's sea of consciousness as a final guarantee of his safety.

The stranger's Qi could cut off all activity within this restaurant, as well as the cold Qi released by Mu Jiushi, from the world, but it could not cut off a connection created by true blood, between souls.

Mu Jiushi was roused from her somewhat perplexed mood and lightly flicked her finger.

A gentle wind rose from her fingertip and fell on Bie Tianxin's body.

With a rustle, the ice sculpture collapsed into countless shards, which were then ground by the wind into tiny crystalline grains.

The blue-clothed stranger stretched out his hand and took those grains on the floor into his sleeve, and then left the restaurant with Mu Jiushi.

A priest entered the room and used a broom to sweep the floor clean.

If Chen Changsheng were present, he would definitely have recognized this priest, as this priest was an old acquaintance of the Orthodox Academy.

Priest Xin of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education had appeared once more after three years, but now it was in Fengyang City. Why was this?

Priest Xin took a stool from the neighboring room and sat down in the nearby corridor. Closing his eyes, he began to wait.

His complexion was rather unsightly, because he was waiting to die.

A fishing boat left Fengyang City's port, traveling upstream. Once it was out of view, it began to speed along without any wind, traveling at unimaginable speeds.

In a short while, the fishing boat was several dozen li away.

The blue-clothed stranger stood on the bow of the boat, calmly regarding the swiftly flowing river. Was he trying to see something in there, or was he looking for the marks left behind not long ago when a certain person stepped on the water?

Mu Jiushi sat in the boat, looking at the stranger's back as she said, "The Black Dragon was not at Fengyang City today."

The blue-clothed stranger replied, "Yes."

Confused, Mu Jiushi asked, "Since we weren't able to act in Hanqiu City, why were we able to act today?"

The blue-clothed stranger answered, "First, our time is short. Second, I didn't know where the Black Dragon was that day, but I know where she is today, and nobody else knows."

Mu Jiushi didn't understand, but she trusted in his words.

The stranger had seemingly seen something, and lightly waved his sleeve.

The crystalline powder dropped from his sleeve and was instantly whisked away by the rushing river, leaving behind no trace, not even a ripple.

.....

.....

The River of Hatred had many tributaries. One of these

tributaries had very clear water, with many trees growing along its banks, creating beautiful sceneries. It was called the Tong River.

In the upper reaches of the Tong River was a group of lush and tall mountains, one of the mountain ranges of the south.

There was a peak in the depths of these mountains that was wrapped in clouds year-round, making it seem particularly mysterious and sacred.

It was the holy land for countless cultivators and believers: Holy Maiden Peak.

South Stream Temple was on Holy Maiden Peak, and the region it administered was even larger. At least a hundred mountains and a thousand li of plains were under its management.

Like the Longevity Sect, South Stream Temple was also an ancestral hall of the southern Orthodoxy faction, with many small sects like Gentle Stream Monastery and the Lotus Pond subordinate to it. Paired with the common people that had lived here for generation after generation, it was a thriving place and very lively. This was especially the case for the small village on the banks of the Tong River, which was bustling to the extreme.

One afternoon, the river outside the village was as peaceful as usual when a gale suddenly sprang up, blowing the reeds flat and causing the grazing oxen to flee in panic.

Two green lights in the air flickered, then vanished.

A girl with a dull expression appeared on the shore of the river. It was Nanke.

Chen Changsheng got up from the ground, brushed the dust off his body, then glanced at Nanke. He wanted to say something, but ultimately chose to keep his silence.

Soon after, three people dropped from the air onto the meadow.

Tang Thirty-Six and Hu Thirty-Two were as usual, looking the

same as they did when they had entered the Garden of Zhou.

But Zhexiu had a rather miserable appearance. His clothes were covered in even more dust than Chen Changsheng's, and they were also a little torn up. Surprisingly, his face was wounded as well.

Chen Changsheng was shocked, thinking, There should be no enemies in the Garden of Zhou, so just who was he fighting with so fiercely?

Seeing his gaze, Zhexiu explained, "I was fighting a round with those monsters."

These words caused Tang Thirty-Six to recall that sight and repeatedly shake his head. Hu Thirty-Two also showed a very complex expression.

As they sat at the highest point of the Mausoleum of Zhou, dust roiled around them, and the monster tide charged forward, their enraged howls seemingly about to tear the sky apart.

Zhexiu was like a rock, occasionally submerged inside the tide, then appearing again. They found themselves admiring him, but also worried.

Chen Changsheng did not ask why Zhexiu had fought those monsters, because he knew the reason.

Back then, in the Plains of the Unsetting Sun, the blind Zhexiu had carried Qi Jian on his back as they fled. He had long since established a deep grudge with those monsters.

Hu Thirty-Two gazed at Chen Changsheng, his expression even more reverential.

In Wenshui City and on their journey through the canyon, this archbishop had been extremely respectful to Chen Changsheng, and it had been a heartfelt respect. Now, however, his respect for Chen Changsheng came from an even deeper part of his heart.

How could one determine the ability and potential of a true

expert? A very simple method was seeing how large a miniature world they could possess.

The larger the miniature world they could control, the more powerful they were.

He had now confirmed the rumor: the Garden of Zhou truly was in the Pope's hands.

Many years ago, he had held a post in the Hall of Pure Virtue and had once entered the Green Leaf World of the previous Pope.

He was certain that the Green Leaf World was far smaller than the Garden of Zhou.

This made him feel even more confident in the future prospects of the Pope, the Orthodoxy, and... himself.

Chen Changsheng naturally did not know that Hu Thirty-Two's entering the Garden of Zhou would have some positive effects, just like how he did not know what benefits would arise from bringing An Hua and Chen Chou into the Garden of Zhou.

His gaze at the moment was focused on that distant group of mountains.

The mountains were graceful and lush with greenery. Even under the light of the noon sun, there was no hint of dryness. Just looking at them would calm one's mind.

As one headed deeper into the mountains, they became lusher and greener, but the sight did not become boring. Gradually, the green was diluted by clouds and mist, adding to the beauty of the mountains.

In the deepest parts of the clouds, one could faintly see an extremely tall mountain. It seemed both real and unreal, its true appearance completely shrouded by the clouds.

Was that Holy Maiden Peak?

Seeing that distant mountain, Tang Thirty-Six became somewhat

excited. After all, Holy Maiden Peak was a renowned holy land, and this was his first time seeing it with his own eyes.

Chen Changsheng's change in mood was more because Holy Maiden Peak was the place where Xu Yourong had lived and cultivated.

In her later letters, Xu Yourong had never described Holy Maiden Peak.

He had imagined it many times.

Although Xu Yourong was still probably in seclusion, unable to meet...

When he thought of how she was on that mountain, he still felt a deep longing.

It was just like that most cliché of descriptions.

He wanted nothing more than to sprout wings and fly over.

Nanke walked in front of him, raised her head, and gave him a very serious look. "You want to fly? Then just tell me."

Alas, it seems like Priest Xin has realized too late the consequence of playing the double agent too many times.

Chapter 871 – The Chronicle of the Mountain Gate

If it were possible to fly, Chen Changsheng would not have had Nanke stop at the river outside the village, but had her fly straight to Holy Maiden Peak.

But that was not possible, as this would show a lack of respect for Holy Maiden Peak, and also because there was a restriction around Holy Maiden Peak.

Even though he was the Pope, if he brought the young Demon Princess and invaded Holy Maiden Peak, he would assuredly incur its wrath.

Their party had to first pass through the village at the foot of the mountain. Nanke once more entered the Garden of Zhou.

The courtyards of the village were very crowded together. He could see that the people here lived rather decent lives, as none of the houses were in great disrepair.

The Tong River was already in the southern region of the continent. The weather was warm and mild. Even in midwinter, it was not at all cold.

Noontime was the ideal time for a respite.

When they walked through the village, they did not encounter too many people.

A store was open on the side of the street. Tang Thirty-Six wanted to go in and buy some small souvenir, while Zhexiu wanted to buy some dried meat in preparation for an emergency, but both of them saw the look on Chen Changsheng's face and said nothing.

Xiao Zhang had not been able to go into too much detail back in Fengyang City, as he had not actually entered Holy Maiden Peak. It was clear, however, that he felt that something had happened.

Chen Changsheng had concluded the same, so he was naturally in a rush.

Because he was in somewhat of a rush as they passed the stores, they didn't notice that inside, the landlady was speaking with two other people.

"I'm not concerned about a little money, and I'm not that good at playing mahjong, but it's been such a long time since the fairy last visited. I'm worried that something might have happened to her."

"Pah, even if your beard burns up, nothing will happen to the fairy."

"Hey, didn't I pay for three of your house's rooms to be remade with brick? Is it necessary to curse me like this to protect her?"

"But still, just where has the fairy gone off to?"

.....

.....

After passing through the village, they entered a forest. It was quiet and secluded, and they didn't see any people on the road.

Chen Changsheng's party began to walk faster, beginning to move so quickly that a normal person would probably only see a blur.

As they proceeded along the road, the forest concealed the fact that they were getting higher and higher, until they were amongst the mountains.

Ten-some li later, a stone gate appeared on the mountain path.

Chen Changsheng did not pay attention to the words written on the stone gate, continuing to press forward.

And then, he was stopped.

Since it was the mountain gate of South Stream Temple, it naturally had disciples to guard it: two girls of around fourteen or

fifteen years old.

These two disciples did not have a very high status in the temple. They did not have any opportunities to travel to faraway places, and had not been to the capital like their senior sisters, so they did not recognize Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six.

"Stop! Who goes there?"

The girls gripped the hilts of their swords and shouted at Chen Changsheng's party.

Their faces were somewhat tense, and they appeared inexperienced.

Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six glanced at each other, both of them recognizing that there was a problem here. Even if this was the mountain gate farthest from the temple and was assigned to ordinary disciples to guard, South Stream Temple would normally be visited by cultivators from subordinate sects or who simply wanted to visit this famous place. As such, South Stream Temple should have arranged for some more mature and composed disciples to stand guard. How could it send two girls like these?

Tang Thirty-Six slightly shook his head, indicating to Chen Changsheng that they should not reveal their identities yet. He stepped forward and said, "We are disciples of Hanqiu City's Emotion-Severing Sect. We have come to Holy Maiden Peak to sightsee."

One girl nervously said, "Just what sort of place is Holy Maiden Peak that you can enter it whenever you please?"

These words made Chen Changsheng's party feel even more perturbed.

Whether it was that 'Who goes there?' or the question just now, they sounded like they had been lifted from a book. Where was the tone of voice that the disciples of South Stream Temple usually

spoke in?

Tang Thirty-Six stared at the girl and arched his brow. "Since when did South Stream Temple have this sort of rule?"

Both the Li Palace and Holy Maiden Peak prioritized transmitting the Dao to all living beings. They had never once refused entry to the faithful or fellow cultivators, as this would cut off access to a few truly important places.

The two South Stream Temple disciples grew even more nervous, as they didn't know how to respond.

"Perhaps the temple closing has made the guard stricter."

Chen Changsheng said to Tang Thirty-Six, "Let's just reveal our identities."

Hearing this, the two disciples suddenly came to their senses and realized that this party's claim that they were disciples of the Emotion-Severing Sect was a lie.

They became even more nervous, pulling out their swords and shakily asking, "Just who are you?"

Tang Thirty-Six had originally planned to declare who he was, but he couldn't help but find their nervous expressions to be rather amusing. Wanting to tease them, he walked forward.

The two girls felt even more nervous, the swords in their hands beginning to shake, but they had no intention of backing down.

With two light shouts that were clearly still a little shaky, the two girls thrust their swords at Tang Thirty-Six.

Before they attacked, the girls were clearly very nervous, even afraid.

But when they used their sword techniques, all their nerves and fear disappeared, because they were disciples of South Stream Temple and used the sword style of South Stream Temple.

Clear and beautiful sword glows illuminated the stone gate and

descended towards Tang Thirty-Six.

Witnessing this sight, Zhexiu felt respect. Only by practicing from morning to night could one rely on only one's sword to calm their heart.

Witnessing this sight, Hu Thirty-Two felt apprehension. He thought, even the most ordinary disciple of South Stream Temple has such fine swordplay. It seems that our fellow sects of the south can't be underestimated.

Witnessing this sight, Chen Changsheng felt puzzled. He thought, what sort of sword style is this? It looks rather familiar, and it also seems to be hiding something.

Standing in front of this sight, Tang Thirty-Six watched as those bright sword glows stabbed towards him. Let alone fear, he didn't even have much intent to fight.

Yes, these two disciples truly possessed fine swordplay, but their cultivation was far too ordinary. They weren't even at Ethereal Opening, so how could they possibly be his match?

He laughed and stepped forward, intending to break this attack with a wave of his hand, thus perfectly flaunting his graceful demeanor to these two girls.

But in the next moment, his laughter transformed into an astonished gasp, which soon after became an angry "Ouch!"

The sword glows receded and the two South Stream Temple disciples retreated behind the mountain gate. Their chests were lightly heaving and their faces had once more become nervous.

Tang Thirty-Six had not been injured, but one of his sleeves had been torn. It looked rather comical.

He couldn't laugh.

If this were a real battle, he naturally hadn't lost, but in terms of comparing swords, he had already lost one round.

The two girls had ordinary cultivations, so no matter how fine their swordplay, it should have been impossible for them to defeat him.

The problem was that the sword techniques used by these two disciples were somehow linked. If they were used at the same time, they would begin to naturally cooperate, and the power of the move would suddenly increase, their sword techniques turning from fine to exquisite, surprisingly seeing through all of Tang Thirty-Six's paths of retreat.

Chen Changsheng, who had learned the Intellectual Sword from Su Li, had only been able to find three gaps in this sword technique. Just from how exquisite it was, the sword technique used by these two girls of South Stream Temple could even defeat those Star Condensation experts he met in the wilderness back then.

What sword style was this that it was so formidable?

Chapter 872 – Holy Maiden Peak in the Clouds

"It should be the Unity Sword Art," Hu Thirty-Two said.

This name prompted Chen Changsheng to recall that legendary sword style.

Holy Maiden Peak was most renowned for South Stream Temple's sword array.

It was said that countless years ago, even Zhou Dufu, the supreme expert beneath the starry sky, had been delayed by this sword array for a time when he was invading Holy Maiden Peak.

In the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, this sword array was also the reason the several dozen South Stream Temple disciples that Xu Yourong had left for Chen Changsheng's sake had intimidated many experts.

The foundation of the South Stream Temple sword array was the Unity Sword Art.

This supremely exquisite sword art required two people to use, emphasizing the trust and connection between the user and their companion. Apparently, once mastered, two South Stream Temple disciples using the Unity Sword Art could defeat four opponents of the same level, while three disciples could defeat nine. Continuing in this fashion, the more disciples of South Stream Temple used the Unity Sword Art, the more frightening was the power they could display. The strongest version of South Stream Temple's sword array was said to be formed from three hundred or more disciples, and one could imagine how powerful this was. Even an expert of the Divine Domain might not be willing to directly confront its edge.

It was no wonder that Xiao Zhang had mentioned that the sword array of those girls had been troublesome.

But Chen Changsheng still felt that there was something wrong.

The sword style used by these two South Stream Temple disciples was not the same Unity Sword Art that he had read about. It seemed to have been changed somewhat.

The problem was, just who could alter a supremely exquisite sword style like the Unity Sword Art? Not even Su Li might be able to do it.

.....

.....

Tang Thirty-Six had also heard Hu Thirty-Two's words, through which he found out that this was South Stream Temple's Unity Sword Art.

But he couldn't care about this much. His sleeve had been torn, making him extremely angry. Looking at the two girls, he shouted, "You've made me unhappy!"

Zhexiu turned his head, not wanting to look at him.

Chen Changsheng replied, "It's your own problem. What were you doing scaring them like that?"

Tang Thirty-Six angrily retorted, "You still haven't actually married, so can you not protect the people of your wife's home in advance?"

The two girls looked at each other in confusion. They had no idea what these people were talking about.

Tang Thirty-Six's smile faded. With a solemn expression, he raised the Wenshui Sword and said, "Please instruct me."

He naturally wasn't really angry. He was showing his respect towards these two disciples of South Stream Temple.

The two girls felt the change in his mood, and their expressions also turned grave as they raised the swords in their hands.

Sword glows suddenly flashed once more on the mountain path. The trees around the stone gate were suddenly assailed by fierce winds that left mark after mark on their trunks.

Two cracks resounded, and then the two girls were forced back behind the stone gate. Their faces were pale, and only half their swords remained in their hands.

"Yield." Tang Thirty-Six tied the sword back to his belt. From start to finish, the Wenshui Sword had never left its sheath.

At this sight, the two girls finally sensed the difference in strength. They couldn't help but feel despair, as well as a deep humiliation.

South Stream Temple was a holy land of the Daoist faith. Whether in the village or at other sects, they would always be regarded as fairy-like existences. No one had ever treated them with such disrespect.

In the past few days, when they guarded the mountain gate, they had encountered a few cultivators or ordinary travelers that wanted to enter the mountain. They had only needed to say a few words to make them retreat—not one had dared to intrude upon the mountain.

Even if the disciples of South Stream Temple were no match, they could not just allow invaders to enter Holy Maiden Peak.

They took an item from their sleeves, possibly a magical artifact that they intended to use to warn the mountain.

At this moment, two thick and broad palms fell on their shoulders, restraining their two most important meridians.

Hu Thirty-Two had silently passed the mountain gate and come up behind the two disciples.

He smiled and shook his head, indicating that they should not struggle.

What he thought was a suitably gentle smile was as frightening as a fiend in the eyes of these two girls.

Sensing a man's hands on their shoulders, imagining how he only needed to use a little true essence to sever their meridians, thinking about how this man had so easily intruded through the mountain gate that they were guarding, the two girls were anxious, angry, and scared. Suddenly, they began to cry.

"I said that we shouldn't copy the words on those books, as something was sure to go wrong."

"The senior sisters are busy every day with matters of the temple. They don't have the mind to pay attention to us, and how could I know how to guard the mountain gate?"

The two girls sobbed as they talked, occasionally using their sleeves to wipe their tears. Their tear-stained faces were truly most pitiful.

Tang Thirty-Six repeatedly shook his head and thought, just what is going on in the temple that they had these two clearly inexperienced girls guard the temple gate?

No matter how tragically the girls wept, Hu Thirty-Two's expression did not change. He maintained his faint smile and then glanced at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning and said, "I'll go first and take a look."

Zhexiu said, "I'll be in the shadows."

Saying this, he vanished into the forest. The blazing sun made the tree leaves cast countless shadows, and one of them was his.

.....

.....

After walking past South Stream Temple's mountain gate, Chen Changsheng was still welcomed by a seemingly endless mountain

path.

It was not appropriate for Nanke to appear right now, so Chen Changsheng pushed his speed to its maximum. Occasionally, he would use the Yeshi Step, appearing on the side of the path, then the west. Like a gale, he swept across the path. Only when the road turned would he leave a blur on the shiny surface of the green bamboo.

The graceful curves of the mountains made for a pleasing sight, but he had no mind for such things. He let the howling wind strike him, his eyes wide open as he stared at the path in front of him, looking out for the smallest changes. His spiritual sense was also traveling with the wind, sensing the activity in front of him, but its primary goal was to identify those arrays.

In her letters, Xu Yourong had not described the matters of South Stream Temple in too much detail, but she had spoken about the arrays and restrictions on the mountain path.

As expected, in the ten-some li of mountain path after the bamboo forest, Chen Changsheng had encountered several ingenious arrays. Even at his level of strength, even if he simultaneously struck with all his swords, he would still need a very long time to break through those arrays.

Fortunately, Xu Yourong had described these things many times, both in their conversation in the Garden of Zhou's snowbound temple and in the Mausoleum of Books, so he had a certain understanding of these arrays. He was also the Pope, and even though the north and south factions of the Orthodoxy were somewhat different, they had still originated from the same source, so he managed to very quickly find the gate of life for these arrays and easily pass through them.

The gates of life for these arrays were often far from the mountain path, at some stream or by some boulder, but they pointed in roughly the same direction. He continued to run

towards the cliff, and behind this cliff were clouds that seemed like they would never disperse. Holy Maiden Peak's indistinct form lay within these clouds. Even so close, he still could not see its true appearance.

Chapter 873 – Two Sides of the Stone Wall

As he charged over to that cliff, Chen Changsheng saw many disciples of South Stream Temple. They were currently rushing down the mountain along the path, presumably alarmed by the turmoil at the mountain gate. Amongst those disciples, he saw a few familiar faces, which put him at ease, as this would prevent any misunderstandings from occurring.

He quickly reached the cliff. Pine trees grew along this cliff of white stone, and many slender waterfalls dropped down from it. In front of this cliff was a large plateau. Between the trees, he could see countless buildings constructed in a clear and beautiful style, presumably the legendary South Stream Temple. On a normal visit, he would have taken some time to properly appreciate it, but he was not in the mood. After glancing at it, he continued to swiftly make his way up the cliff.

There was no path on this cliff, only densely packed forests and precipitous cliffs. Even monkeys, skilled in climbing, would find traversing this cliff rather arduous, but it did not pose much of a challenge to Chen Changsheng.

As he climbed up the cliff, getting higher and higher, the cliff gradually steepened, and the clouds around him thickened. Eventually, he could no longer see South Stream Temple below him or even the sky above him. He could only rely on his impressions from before, but he didn't find it difficult. On the contrary, he found the feeling rather familiar.

In Xining Village, he would occasionally follow his senior brother to that solitary mountain in the depths of the clouds to pick herbs, so he was very familiar with this sort of environment.

After some time, the clouds suddenly grew lighter, the sky above him much clearer.

Chen Changsheng felt energized.

A cold wind, somewhat moist, blew through the trees and oddly-shaped rocks of the mountain and fell on his face.

The clouds suddenly scattered, opening up an expansive view before him. If he looked north, he could even see the twisting line of the Tong River.

This was the summit of Holy Maiden Peak.

.....

.....

Chen Changsheng was certain that this was where Xu Yourong had secluded herself, but he circled around the summit twice, saw several hundred ancient trees that he had never seen before, saw the rock by the cliff that she had mentioned in a letter, and even saw a few of those cute, jade-colored birds she had mentioned, yet did not see a cave.

He didn't see the White Crane either.

But he had already calmed down. After hearing Xiao Zhang's report in Fengyang, he had been very nervous and anxious, but after entering, all his nerves and anxiety vanished. The peak was just like she had described, not a single detail out of place, and there were no signs of battle either.

What continued to confuse him, to put him on his guard, was that Xu Yourong would probably need several years to emerge from her seclusion, so logically speaking, South Stream Temple should have left a few disciples on the summit to attend to her, or else what would happen if something went wrong in her cultivation and she required assistance?

He walked back to the north face of the summit. There were a few ancient trees here, as well as a very shallow pool of water. This was the place where he felt there should be a cave. Besides the position, scenery, and pool, his conclusion had been based on the fact that this was where the oldest and most numerous monolith

inscriptions could be found.

One could see monolith inscriptions all over the cliff walls of Holy Maiden Peak's summit.

These monolith inscriptions had been carved into the rock, and there were a few that were very familiar.

The monolith inscriptions of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths.

Xu Yourong had told him that these were rubbings of the Heavenly Tome Monolith inscriptions made by the first Holy Maiden when she visited the Mausoleum of Books in the capital.

These were different from the rubbings sold outside the Plum Garden Inn. These rubbings contained the supreme wisdom and peerless soul of the first Heavenly Tome Monolith, contained the true meaning of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. South Stream Temple's understanding of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths had never been inferior to the Li Palace's, and in certain aspects was even superior. It was precisely because they had these monolith inscriptions.

Chen Changsheng found the monolith inscriptions of the Reflecting Monolith and caressed them, his fingers feeling the cool stone.

These lines and the inscriptions in the Mausoleum of Books were practically identical, with only a few extremely subtle differences.

These differences were not mistakes. Rather, they signified the first Holy Maiden's understanding of the monolith inscriptions.

Compared to other cultivators, Chen Changsheng had a far superior understanding of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, even compared to true geniuses.

This was because he had five Heavenly Tome Monoliths on his wrist.

With just a light caress, he came to know that if he carefully

researched the monolith inscriptions on the summit of Holy Maiden Peak, it would assuredly have great benefits to his cultivation.

But those were all matters for the future. He first had to find that cave.

At this moment, he felt that the cliff beneath his fingers was shaking.

An indistinct Qi, seemingly flickering in and out of existence, emerged from the dense ivy.

He followed that Qi and pulled aside the ivy.

Behind the ivy was still the cliff. In both look and feel, it was solid rock. Even if one used a hammer to smash at it, one would smash out countless pieces of rock.

But Chen Changsheng knew that behind this cliff was not rock, but space. In other words, the cave at the summit of Holy Maiden Peak was within.

It wasn't because he could see through the ingenious arrays built into the cliff, but because of the ivy.

The ivy was also an array. Though it was inferior in power to the arrays on the cliff, it was similarly able to obstruct the eyes of a Divine Domain expert.

Chen Changsheng could see through this ivy because he recognized it.

This ivy was the Tong Palace.

The Tong Palace was an array, one that he had seen in the capital's Imperial Palace.

The Tong Palace formed by the ivy, however, he had seen in the Garden of Zhou.

At the Mausoleum of Zhou, Xu Yourong had converted the Tong Bow into the Tong Palace, its green leaves swaying in the furious

storm. Even though she was heavily injured and on the verge of death, the Tong Palace remained sturdy.

Since the ivy was the Tong Palace, the Tong Bow, her bow, she should be within this cliff.

It was evident that the Tong Bow ivy recognized who he was and did not attack, did not send out a warning. It only exuded a soft and beautiful light.

Chen Changsheng looked at the ivy in his hands, recalling that sight on the Bridge of Helplessness: the white gauze dropping down, his eyes resting on her face.

In the sky full of snow, her face was like a painting, suffused with a faint and gentle light, imbued with an indescribable beauty.

He gazed at the ice-cold wall of stone in front of him.

She was on that side of the stone wall.

He was on this side of the stone wall.

If gazes had an actual heat, the ice-cold wall would probably have begun to burn.

It would be better if this were a stone door. He could easily push it open, or perhaps lightly knock and ask, 'Is anyone home?'

No, even if this were a stone door, he could not push it open, could not lightly knock.

Just like now, he could only quietly look at it.

Chapter 874 – I Remember Well Those Beautiful Sights

Xu Yourong was cultivating on the other side of the stone wall. She might have reached the critical moment, where any external disturbance might place her in extreme danger.

So Chen Changsheng could not do anything, but he also could not leave. He quietly stood in front of the stone wall for a very long time.

At the very start, it was because he was feeling yearning and a few extremely complex emotions, but later on, it was because he had a bad feeling.

In terms of calculation and deduction, there was the Demon Military Advisor Black Robe, the deceased Elder of Heavenly Secrets, his master Shang Xingzhou, and after them was Xu Yourong.

Chen Changsheng did not have a Fated Star Plate, nor had he ever learned to calculate and deduce, but he had learned the Intellectual Sword from Su Li.

From a certain perspective, the Intellectual Sword was a method of calculating and deducing.

He began to think back, all the way to that letter he had received at the Mount Song Army headquarters.

After that was Hanqiu City, Wenshui City, and then Fengyang City.

Just what had happened in South Stream Temple? Holy Maiden Peak was clearly still peaceful, just like she had described in her letters.

It was like nothing had happened, but Xiao Zhang had truly failed to enter Holy Maiden Peak.

He felt more and more that if she continued to remain secluded within this stone wall, she would encounter some problems.

He could not watch as this happened. He had to make clear just where these problems she would encounter would originate.

The problem was not on her side of the stone wall, but on his side.

He only needed to find this problem and resolve it to remove any possible threat to Xu Yourong.

Just what sort of problem would affect Xu Yourong on her side of the wall?

Whether it was the Tong Bow transformed into ivy or the formidable arrays on the stone wall, they would both ensure that she would not be harmed by anything from the outside world.

Chen Changsheng left the stone wall and walked to the edge of the cliff.

The Tong River flowed across the plains to the north. From his extremely high vantage point, it seemed extremely meandering.

In the light of the setting sun, it looked just like a golden thread carelessly thrown on the table by a girl after an afternoon of embroidery.

This sort of description had appeared some two years ago in a letter Xu Yourong had written to him.

The gray stone by the cliff had also been mentioned in her letters. She liked to sit there and see the sights.

Chen Changsheng sat on the edge of the cliff and gazed at these beautiful sights.

[He remembered well these beautiful sights.](#)

.....

.....

The sights were very beautiful and were hard to get tired of, but Chen Changsheng only looked at them for a short while before withdrawing his gaze.

He took out a rather ancient book and began to read.

In his moment of composure, he had still failed to find the problem, or even a clue, so he decided to stop searching. He had not given up, but understood the principle that the more one focused on the problem, the easier it was to miss it.

He began to recollect everything that had happened since the Mount Song Army headquarters, starting from the most recent events. He first recalled the two girls of South Stream Temple that he had encountered at the mountain gate.

The Unity Sword Art of South Stream Temple used by those two girls had initially even managed to catch Tang Thirty-Six somewhat unprepared.

At the time, he had felt that their Unity Sword Art was subtly different from the Unity Sword Art that he knew of, which made him somewhat puzzled.

Could it be related to the matter that worried him?

The foundation of the Unity Sword Art was the temple sword.

The old book he was reading was called 'Harmonious Examination of the Temple Sword', and it had been written by a female professor of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green who had studied in South Stream Temple for thirty years.

From a certain point of view, this senior of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green had lived a life very similar to Xu Yourong.

This was Chen Changsheng's first time formally researching the Unity Sword Art, and the more he read about it, the more admiration he felt. It was clearly a very simple sword style, yet it had very high demands on the practitioner. It was no wonder that

in the entire continent, only the disciples of South Stream Temple, who were relatively cut off from the world and had clear and bright Dao hearts, could cultivate this sword style to the pinnacle and ultimately create the world-shaking sword array of South Stream Temple.

Chen Changsheng was publicly acknowledged as a genius of the sword, and if one disregarded his age, he could even be called a grandmaster of the sword.

His knowledge and understanding of the sword were improving by the day, and in response, he was growing increasingly obsessed with it. Although he could not match up to Su Li and the people of the Mount Li Sword Sect, seeing such a fresh sword style like the Unity Sword Art naturally made him gradually fall into intoxication, gradually forget the passing of time.

The setting sun shone over the Tong River and over Holy Maiden Peak, growing increasingly red and warm.

Chen Changsheng was already on the third book related to the temple sword and the Unity Sword Art.

His left hand held a book while the forefinger and middle finger of his right hand were held together, imitating a sword and constantly gesturing in the air.

He himself was unaware that with his actions, an invisible sword intent emerged from his fingertips and sliced the warm light and chilly mountain winds into countless pieces.

The cliff's edge resounded with the howling of the air.

The drifting clouds dispersed and the spirit beasts in the forests fled into the distance. Only those jade birds nearby tilted their heads and watched him with interest.

One could roughly guess at what they were thinking: just who is this person? Why are his actions exactly identical to that fairy?

At this moment, the clear cry of a crane resounded in the air.

The jade birds took flight, searching the trees for the most appealing mushrooms to serve as their dinner.

The spirit beasts in the forest retreated even further away.

All the clouds suddenly scattered.

A White Crane broke through the clouds, circled down onto the ground, and then walked up to Chen Changsheng.

The crane's cry had awakened Chen Changsheng from his stupor, and he now stroked the White Crane's slender neck.

The White Crane lightly pecked his hand, then it looked down towards the plateau shrouded in clouds and gave a soft cry.

Chen Changsheng understood that it was telling him that something had happened down below.

Given the time that had passed, Tang Thirty-Six and the others should have already entered South Stream Temple. Did a misunderstanding really occur?

He stood, gazed at the stone wall in the rays of the setting sun, and said, "I'll come back again."

.....

.....

When Chen Changsheng was climbing the cliff, Tang Thirty-Six was admiring the sights on the mountain path.

After releasing the two South Stream Temple disciples, he and Hu Thirty-Two began to slowly walk while they waited for someone important from South Stream Temple to appear.

They had beaten the grass precisely so they could alarm the snake. Their straightforward intrusion of the mountain gate had precisely been intended to bring the attention away from Chen Changsheng, so they naturally couldn't travel silently.

The reason he was in the mood to leisurely stroll and appreciate

his surroundings was that he thought the same as Chen Changsheng. Even if there were some misunderstandings with South Stream Temple, it wouldn't be too big of a deal.

In Tang Thirty-Six's view, Xu Yourong was the Holy Maiden, so South Stream Temple was hers. If there was some misunderstanding, it would just be like a couple's quarrel, easily mended, so there was no need to care about it too much.

As they walked through the sea of bamboo, Tang Thirty-Six praised, "An excellent view."

Suddenly, countless cracks could be heard.

The bamboo incessantly swayed, the sea frothing with violent waves.

Sword Qi erupted and countless slender bamboo leaves rustled down in a torrential rain, all of them on Tang Thirty-Six's body.

Hu Thirty-Two was some distance from the bamboo forest and had managed to avoid this rain of leaves.

Tang Thirty-Six was covered in bamboo leaves and looked rather miserable, but he didn't think so. On the contrary, he proudly said, "How elegant."

The bamboo leaves had finished falling, the sword Qi had receded, and ten-some girls appeared on the mountain path, preventing him and Hu Thirty-Two from retreating.

The two girls from the mountain gate were amongst them.

This saying, '风景旧曾谙', originates from the poem 'Remembering Jiangnan' by Bai Juyi.

Chapter 875 – South Stream Temple's Martial Grandaunt?

"Senior Sister, it's them!"

The two girls looked at Tang Thirty-Six and resentfully said, "I don't know where these evildoers came from that they are so presumptuous as to force their way through the mountain gate!"

Tang Thirty-Six stared. There were quite a few familiar faces amongst these girls, especially that delicate girl leading them.

"Oh, Ye Xiaolian, it's you."

He didn't expect to so quickly encounter an acquaintance, and happily stepped forward.

The two girls were startled and subconsciously hid behind Ye Xiaolian.

Ye Xiaolian had also not expected for the crazy fellow that her junior sisters told her about that dared to force their way through the mountain gate to be Tang Thirty-Six.

The disciple of South Stream Temple that the people of the Orthodox Academy were most familiar with was Ye Xiaolian. Without even bringing up that earliest story, the two sides had interacted with each other for a long time on the journey from Mount Han to the Orthodox Academy.

Surprised, she asked, "How could it be you?"

Tang Thirty-Six did not notice the strangeness in her expression. Smiling, he recounted what had happened earlier.

As he spoke, the two girls grew more and more confused, thinking, why is Senior Sister not one bit angry? Why is Senior Sister also smiling?

Does Senior Sister actually know this crazy person, and is even

friends with them?

After listening to Tang Thirty-Six's tale and comparing it with the words of her two junior sisters, Ye Xiaolian understood what had happened. She tersely said to Tang Thirty-Six, "Didn't they just ask you a few questions? Why'd you scare them like this? Didn't you see how young they were?"

Tang Thirty-Six very earnestly replied, "Shouldn't you know how gentle my personality is?"

Of course, this was sarcasm. Everyone knew what sort of person he was, and none more than Ye Xiaolian. Several years ago, when she was about the same age as these two junior sisters, just when had this scoundrel ever pitied or spared her? He was truly a shameless thing.

When she thought about how she had been scolded into tears by this scoundrel on the Divine Avenue, she couldn't but feel somewhat humiliated. She glared at Tang Thirty-Six and spat.

Tang Thirty-Six naturally knew why she did this and smiled. "I say, what sort of attitude is this? I happen to be a guest today."

"I certainly don't remember inviting you."

With this brusque remark, Ye Xiaolian ceased to pay him any attention. She turned to Hu Thirty-Two, her smile fading as she serenely said, "Third-generation disciple of South Stream Temple, Ye Xiaolian."

Hu Thirty-Two replied, "Previous Archbishop of Wenshui, Hu Thirty-Two."

On the side, Tang Thirty-Six noted, "This is a cardinal of the Orthodoxy, and he might even enter the Hall of Announcements in a few days. By no means should you neglect your manners."

These words simultaneously teased the both of them.

Ye Xiaolian was first angry, then surprised.

As a disciple of South Stream Temple, she naturally knew that the position of Archbishop of the Hall of Announcements had been vacant for three years now. If she had not misunderstood Tang Thirty-Six's meaning, this rather ordinary-looking individual would become a Prefect of the Orthodoxy in a few days? But Tang Thirty-Six didn't have much of a relationship with the eminent figures of the Orthodoxy, so why had they come to Holy Maiden Peak together? Could it be...

She thought of a possibility and looked at Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six nodded.

Ye Xiaolian's eyes became exceptionally bright. She seemed very happy, but her mood was also somewhat more complex than that.

There was delight, some relief after exhausting oneself for a long time, and there was also unease and confusion.

Suddenly, a voice came from the mountain path behind them.

"Just who are you that you dare to intrude on a holy land?"

This was an ice-cold voice, but also one of incredible majesty, like some high official of the Imperial Court, and also like the iron laws of the Hall of Drifting Clouds, imbued with an aura of unshakable might.

As this voice rang out, the sea of bamboo once more raged, and Ye Xiaolian's expression turned much gloomier.

A Daoist nun appeared on the mountain path. It was difficult to identify a specific age, but from her temperament, she was probably middle-aged.

She wore a black temple uniform, her sleeves drifting in the wind imbuing her with a transcendent aura. However, her level brows also gave her an extremely composed feeling.

Several dozen South Stream Temple disciples followed behind her.

Upon the arrival of this black-clothed Daoist nun, the disciples who had arrived first hurriedly bowed and said, "Martial Grandaunt."

This address made Tang Thirty-Six slightly raise his brows in surprise.

In his impressions, South Stream Temple should have been managed by the second-generation disciples. He had never heard about elders from the previous generations.

Xu Yourong was a second-generation disciple while Ye Xiaolian counted as a third-generation disciple.

This black-clothed Daoist nun had such a high status?

He brushed off the bamboo leaves, tidied his clothes, and prepared to greet the nun.

The Daoist nun didn't even glance at him, much less give him a chance to explain.

"Ye Xiaolian, why is your sword not raised? You plan on letting outsiders into the mountain?"

The Daoist nun harshly reproved Ye Xiaolian.

Ye Xiaolian was startled at these words and felt thoroughly wronged. Her eyes slightly reddened and she raised her head, intending to argue.

The Daoist nun's complexion turned even gloomier, her voice harsher. "Do you still not recognize your wrongs?"

"You've said enough."

Tang Thirty-Six pulled Ye Xiaolian behind him and said, "Do you feel proud, disciplining your disciple in front of outsiders?"

When he was unhappy, he did not care if his opponent was some extremely senior Martial Grandaunt of South Stream Temple.

Hu Thirty-Two saw that something was not right and hurriedly

stepped forward. Looking to the Daoist nun, he said, "We are attending upon His Holiness the Pope, with no intentions of intruding upon the mountain. I request Senior's insightful judgment."

These words confirmed Ye Xiaolian's previous conjectures. After a momentary surprise, her eyes turned even redder, not because she felt wronged, but because she was excited.

Those female disciples who had gone to Mount Han and were acquainted with the Orthodox Academy looked at each other and smiled, seemingly very happy.

A sudden bout of coughing, suffused with an air of stern authority, instantly caused these smiles to fade.

"You are saying that His Holiness the Pope has come to our South Stream Temple?"

The black-clothed nun coldly asked the pair, "Then where is His Holiness?"

Hu Thirty-Two didn't know how to reply. Could it be that the Pope had been concerned that South Stream Temple might be in internal strife and so sneaked into Holy Maiden Peak without sending a message?

Tang Thirty-Six was a master at resolving awkward situations like this, because the trait necessary for such a task was precisely a very thick skin.

"The Pope had a burning anxiety in his heart and went first. He should already be on Holy Maiden Peak. If you want pay him respects, you will have to wait a while."

He pointed at the end of the mountain path as he spoke. There was a cliff there, and behind the cliff was a beautiful mountain wrapped in the clouds.

The Daoist nun ignored the jeering tone in his words. Staring into his eyes, she said, "Holy Maiden Peak is not so easy to intrude

upon."

Tang Thirty-Six felt a powerful pressure and arched his brows. "The Orthodoxy's north and south come from the same source. Even if they're the seals of South Stream Temple, how could they harm His Holiness the Pope? So much time has passed, and there's still no disturbance; it appears that Holy Maiden Peak... has heartily welcomed him."

Everyone could hear the hidden meaning in his words.

Tang Thirty-Six had just not wanted to lose out in terms of demeanor, but he hadn't expected his speculations to be so close to the truth.

The Daoist nun's expression turned even colder. "A person who enters without asking is a thief, and when has a master ever welcomed a thief into their home?"

Tang Thirty-Six raised his brows and questioned, "These words are deeply disrespectful to His Holiness. Do you still persist in acting?"

"Since you've entered the mountain without sending a message beforehand, you are not comrades, but foreign invaders."

The Daoist nun stared into his eyes and said expressionlessly, "Somebody, come and seize these two."

There were thirty-some South Stream Temple disciples on the mountain path, enough to form a sword array. Xiao Zhang or Liang Wangsun would find it difficult to break through such a sword array, much less Tang Thirty-Six.

If these disciples began to attack, Tang Thirty-Six and Hu Thirty-Two would have no other choice but to flee back down the mountain.

They did not move, because the disciples of South Stream Temple had not moved.

The ten-some disciples that had gone to the Orthodox Academy exchanged glances, their expressions apprehensive, their minds perplexed as to what they should do. Those disciples who had not gone to the Orthodox Academy subconsciously gripped their swords, but then they remembered the stories their martial sisters had told them two years ago and turned to Ye Xiaolian, asking with their eyes what they should do.

The mountain path was absolutely silent.

Chapter 876 – Donation Money

Ah, silence. If one did not explode into rage to break the silence, then one could only allow the silence to awkwardly persist.

The black-clothed Daoist nun had given an order with her status as a senior martial grandaunt, but none of her disciples had responded. This was the most awkward of situations.

Tang Thirty-Six was able to resolve all awkward situations because he had a very thick skin.

She clearly did not have such a thick skin, so she felt herself in a very awkward situation, which transformed into rage. Her face slightly blushed, her level brows angled downward.

Ye Xiaolian knew that these were signs of her martial grandaunt's fury, which caused her deep concern. She stepped forward to say a few conciliatory words, but she was too late.

With a snort, the Daoist nun's figure blurred. She lunged down the mountain path, her right hand swatting towards Tang Thirty-Six's chest.

A howl rose over the mountain path and Tang Thirty-Six felt like a massive mountain was charging towards him. It was such terrifying power that he instinctively took out his sword and slashed.

With a clang, the Wenshui Sword left its sheath, shining with a bright light, like countless rays of golden light shining upon the Wenshui.

This black-clothed nun was at a far higher level of cultivation. Just a simple swat of her hand felt like a mountain descending. Even if he used the Three Forms of Wenshui, how could he possibly block it?

Tang Thirty-Six knew that he couldn't block it, so his attack was not aimed at the Daoist nun, but behind him.

The sword technique he used was not the defensive Gathering Evening Clouds, nor was it A Stream of Maples and its fiery lethality. He used his fastest movement technique, Hanging Sunset.

The mountain exploded with golden rays of light, all of it shining from his sword. A seemingly real layer of water seemed to form over the sea of bamboo.

Like a setting sun sinking beneath the mountains, the light suddenly dissipated. The setting sun on the water's surface traveled east with unimaginable speed. One would truly find it difficult to find a faster speed.

The figure within the setting sun was Tang Thirty-Six. Utilizing his swift movement technique, he retreated ten-some zhang.

Boom! The sea of bamboo raged with massive waves, the two rows of bamboo lining the mountain path snapping and falling. A pit several feet deep appeared on the mountain path, sending debris flying in all directions.

Tang Thirty-Six, Wenshui Sword in hand, stood several zhang away, startled by the scene before him.

The black-clothed Daoist nun's strength was truly frightening. Even more frightening was that she had immediately struck out with such a powerful move.

If he was not mistaken, this was one of the supreme techniques of South Stream Temple, the Drifting Cloud Palm!

If he had not reacted so quickly and so resolutely used Hanging Sunset, he would have had to directly confront this palm.

Then wouldn't his sword have snapped like the bamboo?

And he would probably be lying in that pit, heavily injured, or even dead.

The power of the nun's palm was not yet expended. From ten-

some zhang away, it continued to attack Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six's eyes flashed with an extremely rare ruthlessness. Grasping his sword, he prepared to step forward.

Ten-some dull thuds resounded over the mountain path.

Hu Thirty-Two grasped a very ordinary-looking dagger and used a very strange stance to continuously block the palm.

With each strike, a white wisp of wind would appear on his dagger.

The remaining energy of the palm strike was transformed into ten-some wisps of refreshing wind, gradually scattering.

The Daoist nun stood on the mountain path, frowning at this sight, but she did not attack again.

She had not expected that this pair would be able to block the thunderous blow she had unleashed at the peak of her anger, and was somewhat astonished at their level.

In her view, the young master's sword style and movement techniques were quite good, but the truly formidable one was the priest.

"You know the Drifting Cloud Martial Arts?" she said to Hu Thirty-Two.

Without waiting for Hu Thirty-Two's answer, she turned and walked into the bamboo forest.

Tang Thirty-Six had avoided her palm and Hu Thirty-Two had used the Drifting Cloud Martial Arts, which shared the same source as her Drifting Cloud Palm, to disperse the last of her attack's energy, but if she had attacked with her full power, she still had a chance to wound the pair. Yet just when she was ready to push her energy to its limits and unleash her most powerful attack, she suddenly felt a hint of foreboding, like some beast in the bamboo forest was staring at her.

So terrifying was this beast that even she felt it dangerous.

Ye Xiaolian walked up to her side, intending to explain. She was very concerned that her martial grandaunt would continue to attack.

"Martial Grandaunt, they are..."

The black-clothed nun was of extremely high status, yet she had not been able to succeed in dealing with two juniors in one strike. With her status, it was best for her to leave the matter there, but she still felt rather depressed about it.

Coupled with the danger she sensed in the bamboo forest, she was in a foul mood, certainly not in one that would hear Ye Xiaolian's explanation. With a snort, she angrily waved her sleeve.

Her sleeve fell on Ye Xiaolian's left shoulder, letting out a clap.

Ye Xiaolian grunted in pain, her face instantly paling. This sudden strike had injured her.

Tang Thirty-Six could no longer stand by. He leaped over the pit and to Ye Xiaolian's side. As he supported her, he looked at the Daoist nun and said, "Stop, old woman."

These words shocked the disciples of South Stream Temple, even Ye Xiaolian.

The black-clothed Daoist nun was currently one of the seniormost elders of South Stream Temple. No one ever dared to show her the slightest disrespect, let alone call her 'old woman'.

They were unaware that Tang Thirty-Six had even dared to address the Tang Old Master as a useless old man.

The nun turned around and emotionlessly regarded Tang Thirty-Six, waiting for him to speak.

To the disciples of South Stream Temple, their martial grandaunt appeared to be looking at a dead person.

Tang Thirty-Six angrily said, "I felt very unhappy when I saw you

scolding her just now. How could you scold such a beautiful and delicate girl?"

Ye Xiaolian glanced at him and softly reminded, "You've scolded me even more ruthlessly than that."

An unnatural pause ensued, after which Tang Thirty-Six continued, "Even if I've scolded her, does that mean that you can scold her? And besides, all I did was lightly scold her, but you were even willing to strike her?"

The nun impassively replied, "She is a disciple of my South Stream Temple. If I hit her or scold her, what can you do?"

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "I can make it so that the money that the Tang clan donates to South Stream Temple next year will be halved."

Hearing the phrases 'Tang clan' and 'donation', the black-clothed nun narrowed her eyes and asked, "Just who are you?"

Ye Xiaolian indicated that she no longer needed his support and answered, "Martial Grand aunt, he is Tang Tang."

The Daoist nun froze, then harshly said, "So you were that young master of the Tang clan. It's no wonder that you think that just with you..."

"For every extra word you speak, I'll halve the donation again."

Tang Thirty-Six gave her a serious look and continued, "Starting from now, every extra word will result in next year's donation being halved. Relax, no matter how small it gets, there will still be some left. With your intelligence, you might find it hard to understand why, so you don't need to understand. All you need to know is that whatever I say will absolutely be carried out."

The black-clothed nun's complexion turned gloomier and gloomier, her features growing increasingly vicious. She slowly raised her right hand.

The mountain path was utterly silent, with not even a gust of wind, yet the bamboo forest slightly swayed.

At the tensest moment, a serene and gentle voice rose from the distant cliff and was clearly transmitted to everyone on the mountain path.

The bamboo forest was pacified, and the mountain winds began to warmly and gently blow.

"Junior Sister, invite our comrade of the Li Palace and the young master of the Tang clan inside."

Tang Thirty-Six's expression became slightly grave. He was not worried when facing this monstrously powerful Daoist nun, but the owner of this voice had subconsciously made him nervous.

Chapter 877 – The Reason for South Stream Temple's Chaos

That the bamboo sea had fallen silent indicated that the fellow hidden deep inside it had felt the same thing as Tang Thirty-Six.

When she heard this voice, the viciousness on the black-clothed Daoist nun's face gradually retreated. She coldly glared at Tang Thirty-Six, apparently wanting to say something. But she had probably recalled Tang Thirty-Six's earlier threat, so all the words she had planned to say ultimately became a simple snort. With an enraged visage, she flicked her sleeve and left.

Seeing the Daoist nun walk away, Tang Thirty-Six called, "Hey! Don't leave if you have the guts! Snorts also count! Next year's donation will be halved again!"

Those disciples that had not gone to Mount Han or the capital looked at each other, speechless. Is this that young master of the Tang clan that I've heard so much about? Why is he so different from the rumors? This temper is just a little too excessive.

"It's fine, it's fine. Martial Grandaunt certainly doesn't care about any donation. She has a noble clan supporting her. If not for Martial Grandteacher's words, she would have disregarded your threat and smacked you down with a single palm."

Ye Xiaolian raised her petite hand and feigned a punch at Tang Thirty-Six's stomach, then said, "Donation money is used by us disciples. You'd better not actually cut it."

Tang Thirty-Six held his stomach, feigning injury as he sorrowfully said, "Your petite hand and petite face are both quite beautiful, so how come your heart became so prejudiced? It was for your sake that I stepped up."

Ye Xiaolian had long since gotten used to his cheeky demeanor and didn't care much for it. "Since Grandteacher wants to meet

you, let's quickly go."

Tang Thirty-Six finally reacted, asking in shock, "The Holy Maiden returned? What of Su Li? Don't tell me that she was cast off again?"

He was naturally not speaking of Xu Yourong here, but Xu Yourong's teacher, the previous Holy Maiden.

Hu Thirty-Two was also stunned, but upon hearing the last question, he mistepped and almost fell off the mountain path.

Ye Xiaolian and the other girls were angrier. One by one, they fixed Tang Thirty-Six with furious glares, wanting nothing more than to take out their swords and hack him to bits.

"I was just making a joke to lighten the mood; why so serious?" Tang Thirty-Six said with an apologetic smile.

Ye Xiaolian suppressed her temper and explained, "The grandteacher I am referring to here is the senior sister of the martial grandaunt from just now."

Tang Thirty-Six commented, "I feel like you've just said something useless."

Ye Xiaolian was helpless and further explained, "My grandteacher is not the previous Holy Maiden, and that's all you need to know. In terms of seniority, she is an elder of very high status in the temple."

"Just what has happened in South Stream Temple?"

Upon confirming that the black-clothed Daoist nun was far away, Tang Thirty-Six stopped, smiled, and earnestly asked, "Just who are that old woman and the grandteacher that you spoke of? Why have I never heard of them?"

Ye Xiaolian replied, "Please be a little more respectful, and besides... Martial Grandaunt has reached an extremely high realm, has met with success on her cultivation, and so has means of

stopping her appearance from aging. Just how does she look old?"

"For people like them, no matter how young they look, they're already old."

Tang Thirty-Six pointed at his stomach, then looked at the girls of South Stream Temple and declared, "But we are all very young, so there are times when we don't need to listen to them."

The meaning of these words made all the girls fall into a pensive mood.

Hu Thirty-Two sighed, perhaps because he had thought of his own age.

Ye Xiaolian was moved by Tang Thirty-Six's words, and her eyes moistened.

One girl worked up her courage and said, "I'll say it."

Before she could start, a fellow disciple and friend of hers advised, "Martial Grandaunt won't be happy."

"Don't be afraid. You can tell me anything."

Tang Thirty-Six said to Ye Xiaolian, "If that old woman dares to scold you, then there won't be any donation next year."

Ye Xiaolian broke into a smile and asked, "Can you take the responsibility?"

Tang Thirty-Six's expression did not change. "If it's a crime to swindle others so that I can stand up for you, then just lock me up in Zhou Prison."

Ye Xiaolian blushed. "Can't you speak properly?"

Tang Thirty-Six innocently replied, "It's not like I'm a proper person."

.....

.....

Since time immemorial, the cultivators of the south had a

tradition of descending the mountain and traveling the world after reaching some level of success in their cultivation. Scholartree Manor had this tradition, as did the Mount Li Sword Sect, and Holy Maiden Peak was no exception.

Xu Yourong had once gone to the Southern Sea, while her teacher the Holy Maiden had gone off with Su Li to the distant other continent.

Besides them, Holy Maiden Peak also had elders from the previous generation that had spent all this time traveling the world, with long spans of time in between their returns, and it was precisely because of these excessively long intervals that many people had forgotten them. Even if some people did remember, they would think that these elders were still roaming, or perhaps had even returned to the sea of stars.

No one had expected that half a year ago, three elders of the previous generation who had been traveling the world for several decades would suddenly return to Holy Maiden Peak.

These three elders were of extremely high seniority. In the present South Stream Temple, it was actually impossible to find someone of a higher generation than them. To put it another way, they were currently the old ancestors of Holy Maiden Peak.

The return of the old ancestors was naturally the most joyous of occasions, but soon after, everyone realized that their return had caused a very troublesome problem.

When the previous Holy Maiden left, she had not expected these martial sisters of hers who were traveling the world to return, and had directly passed South Stream Temple into the hands of Xu Yourong.

When Xu Yourong entered seclusion, she also had not thought of this matter, and had passed the administration of the temple to two senior sisters of high integrity and steady demeanor.

Now that these ancestors had returned, just who would South Stream Temple be managed by?

Logically speaking, it should have been managed according to Xu Yourong's orders, but these three elders were truly too senior. If they expressed an opinion of the temple's administration, would anyone dare to ignore them?

It would have been for the best if these three martial grandaunts were devoted to cultivation and had no care for the temple's administration, but this was not the case.

They did not care about the day-to-day affairs of the temple, but on one particular matter, they had a very clear and unyielding stance.

This matter involved the relationship between Holy Maiden Peak and the Li Palace.

It was the merging of the Orthodoxy's north and south.

The three martial grandaunts were unbending in their rejection of this matter, and they made a decision certain to shake the entire continent.

This decision was the reason Ye Xiaolian and the other disciples of South Stream Temple were so depressed, their emotions so complex.

.....

.....

After listening to Ye Xiaolian's recount, Tang Thirty-Six thought for a few moments, then asked, "They sent no message before they returned?"

He could understand, even accept, the three elders' fierce opposition to the merging of the Orthodoxy's north and south.

The thoughts of elders were often much more unyielding and impossible to change, his clan's Old Master serving as a prime

example.

What put him on guard was the decision that Ye Xiaolian had not explicitly stated, as well as the information that was hidden behind this matter.

Given that they had left the most hallowed holy land in the world and traveled for several decades, these three martial grandaunts should not have been people that lusted for glory, power, and riches. Even if they did have things that they couldn't let go, just who could have sought them out in this vast continent and then had them return to South Stream Temple to do these things?

"No one had expected for them to suddenly returned. It was just like..." Ye Xiaolian paused, then continued, "A sudden ambush."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "What are their names?"

Ye Xiaolian replied, "My grandteacher is called Huai Ren, and the martial grandaunt you saw has the Daoist name of Huai Bi."

Tang Thirty-Six felt strange. Have I heard these two names somewhere before?

Ye Xiaolian, having no idea what he was thinking, continued, "And there is also a martial grandaunt called Huai Shu."

Tang Thirty-Six [pondered these names](#), then said, "If they're all like that old woman, their true personalities the opposite of their names, then this will be quite the problem."

The Daoist names of Huai Ren, '怀仁', Huai Bi, '怀璧', and Huai Shu, '怀恕', are not their actual names, but names that they take upon leaving secular society and entering the temple. Huai Ren means 'Cherishing Benevolence' and Huai Shu means 'Cherishing Forgiveness'. The 'Bi' of Huai Bi refers to a jade disk with a hole in it that was usually conferred on someone of high social status or moral integrity. Huai Bi's name could also refer to the saying, '匹夫无罪, 怀璧其罪'. The meaning of this saying is that while an ordinary person might be innocent, if they are keeping some sort

of treasure, it might lead to disaster.

Chapter 878 – The Thatched Cottage's Huai Ren

While conversing, the group reached the cliff.

A few pine trees grew on this cliff, and there were also slender waterfalls sending droplets of water splashing everywhere.

In front of the cliff was a large plateau. It was very flat and stretched so far into the distance that its edges could not be seen, making it seem more like a plain than a plateau.

This plateau was covered in trees, and one could see more flowering trees the deeper one went. Behind these flowering trees were countless buildings. The sight of black eaves and white walls peeking through the trees was quite beautiful.

Seeing the legendary South Stream Temple, Hu Thirty-Two found it quite different from the Li Palace and was full of praise. Tang Thirty-Six, however, thought of Wenshui City's ancestral hall and Chicken Crow Mountain outside, falling into a contemplative mood.

They passed through the green and flowering trees, traversing a twisting and turning path of damp stones, and arrived at South Stream Temple.

The group passed through the ceremonial hall, made their way through several small gardens, past several library pavilions, and came to the deepest part of the complex, where they saw a thatched cottage.

Many monoliths were standing around this thatched cottage. A few patches of moss could be seen on these monoliths, but they were incapable of concealing the lines deeply carved on those surfaces.

Both Tang Thirty-Six and Hu Thirty-Two had entered the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths and comprehend the

Dao. At a glance, they were able to recognize that these monoliths were copies of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths.

These were not simple and crude models. The monoliths exuded a timeworn aura, seemingly one with the thatched cottage, creating its own little world. It was a scene that inspired awe and respect.

Despite Tang Thirty-Six's frivolous personality, coming to a place like this made him much quieter, and somewhat concerned that something might happen to the concealed Zhexiu.

Three prayer mats were laid out in the thatched cottage. Light streamed down from the colored glass installed in the roof. These rays of light were in no way dim, allowing one to clearly see what was inside.

The black-clothed Daoist nun they had met near the mountain gate was sitting on the prayer mat placed on the left-hand side. Her expression was still cold, and when she saw Tang Thirty-Six enter the cottage, a hint of viciousness appeared in her eyes.

A Daoist nun dressed in purple sat on the right-hand prayer mat. She had straight, thick eyebrows and most unyielding eyes. One glance was enough to see that she had a violent and fiery personality.

The Daoist nun seated on the center prayer mat wore a white temple uniform. Her expression was warm and gentle, her eyes as clear as the limpid autumn waters. She exuded an amiable and cordial aura.

But when Tang Thirty-Six saw this white-clothed nun, he felt wary, immediately guessing that this was the owner of the voice from earlier.

It was not because her clothes were white, the color most revered by Holy Maiden Peak, but because of the person.

At his side, Ye Xiaolian softly said a few words, bowed to the

three Daoist nuns, then retreated to the back.

Tang Thirty-Six came to know that the purple-clothed Daoist nun was Huai Shu and the white-clothed Daoist nun was Huai Ren.

Huai Ren warmly said, "Young Master Tang and Archbishop Hu, please sit."

Tang Thirty-Six and Hu Thirty-Two obediently sat on the prayer mats intended for guests.

Huai Ren looked at Tang Thirty-Six and asked, "Is the Tang Old Master doing well?"

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "He's fine and hasn't died. But since I'm alive, he's naturally not very happy."

All the continent knew what had happened in Wenshui City, but nobody thought that he would reveal it, and that he would speak so disrespectfully of the Tang Old Master.

Huai Bi sneered at these words while Huai Shu raised her brows, clearly displeased at his words.

"Young Master Tang has spoken well. As long as one is alive, nothing can be better," Huai Ren faintly smiled and said to Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six understood the meaning of this elder of South Stream Temple.

As long as the Tang Old Master was still alive, the Tang clan was the Tang Old Master's Tang clan. His earlier threat to South Stream Temple at the mountain gate would naturally not be realized.

"Right, living is truly the best, but someone like my second uncle would definitely not think so, because he is dead."

Tang Thirty-Six solemnly said, "This is truly a matter worth being happy about."

In what clan would one feel happy if one's uncle died?

Even if the entire world knew of the problems between him and the Tang Second Master, wasn't it improper to speak this way?

Huai Shu's eyebrows rose higher and higher, the anger on her face growing more and more evident. She had a violent nature and regarded evil as her personal enemy, and those she loathed the most were scoundrels who did not respect differences in seniority.

Huai Ren remained serene, but she now looked at Tang Thirty-Six with a more indescribable gaze.

She also understood what Tang Thirty-Six was saying.

She had spoken to tell Tang Thirty-Six that he alone could not threaten South Stream Temple. Tang Thirty-Six had countered by telling her that the Tang Second Master was dead and that he had won the war over the succession of the Tang clan. The Tang clan truly was the Tang Old Master's clan, but in the future, it would end up being his.

Of the donations that South Stream Temple received every year, a large majority was offered by the Tang clan.

But this was not the crucial point. The crucial problem was that South Stream Temple, its innumerable subordinate sects, and its agriculture businesses were in large part intimately tied to the business of the Tang clan.

Many sects did this. If they weren't doing business with the Tang clan, they had to do business with the Qiushan clan, the Wu clan, or the Mutuo Clan.

Cultivation had always been a large business.

With South Stream Temple's status in the world of cultivation, when its elders were choosing a business partner, they naturally chose the candidate with the best reputation, the longest history: the Tang clan.

Who could have expected that after so many years, the successor of the Tang clan would use their partnership to threaten South

Stream Temple?

Huai Ren did not continue this topic with Tang Thirty-Six, instead asking, "Where is Young Master Tang's companion?"

This naturally referred to Zhexiu, which meant that South Stream Temple had known of his presence the entire time and was perhaps keeping an eye on him at this very moment.

Tang Thirty-Six was blessed with a very thick skin, so he calmly asked, "What is Your Reverence speaking of?"

Huai Ren faintly smiling, thinking nothing of his response. She turned to Hu Thirty-Two and asked, "Where is His Holiness the Pope? The disciples of the temple wish to receive the teachings of His Holiness as quickly as possible."

This was a very tactful set of words, and very polite, but the handiwork was not as exquisite, and it was somewhat laughable in how awkwardly it was constructed.

But her meaning was clear enough. Although everyone said that South Stream Temple was descended from the Orthodoxy, and though the Pope was a most revered position, entering without sending a message was still inappropriate.

Though Hu Thirty-Two also had a very thick skin, he knew that now was not the time to act recklessly. He pointed and said, "His Holiness has probably gone to the summit."

A sea of clouds lay behind that cliff, and in those clouds, one could faintly make out a lofty peak, Holy Maiden Peak.

Hearing this, the Daoist nuns seated on the sides were instantly startled, especially the purple-clothed Huai Shu. She furiously yelled, "Preposterous! The Holy Maiden is currently in secluded cultivation and is currently at the most critical moment. It is forbidden for anyone to disturb her lest they cause a deviation in her cultivation. Just who can bear this responsibility! Just what does the Pope plan on doing!"

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "After hearing that there was strife in South Stream Temple, His Holiness the Pope was worried for the Holy Maiden's safety. He ventured over vast distances without sleep or rest to visit. How is that inappropriate?"

Huai Bi sneered, "When has my South Stream Temple suffered any strife? The Holy Maiden's safety naturally has our support, so the concern of outsiders is not needed."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "I hear that Xiao Zhang came to Holy Maiden Peak several days ago?"

Huai Ren raised her hand, ordering her junior sister to no longer speak. She calmly replied, "Correct."

Tang Thirty-Six stared into her eyes and questioned, "Why was he ultimately unable to enter the mountain?"

Three years ago, as snow fell over the capital, Xiao Zhang wielded his spear on the shore of the Luo River and saved the heavily injured Wang Po.

From that moment, regardless of whether Xiao Zhang was willing or not, the entire continent regarded him as a powerful ally of the Orthodoxy and Chen Changsheng.

The Imperial Court pursued him for three whole years for this reason.

At his lowest moment, he came to Holy Maiden Peak for temporary shelter, but he was driven away.

Could it be that Holy Maiden Peak no longer regarded itself as an ally of the Li Palace?

Chapter 879 – The White Crane Sends for Reinforcements

Huai Ren calmly gazed at Tang Thirty-Six, but did not reply.

Tang Thirty-Six calmly looked back, also not speaking. It was clear that he wanted nothing more than for her to give an answer.

Huai Shu harshly said, "A madman like Xiao Zhang, whose hands are drenched in blood? How could we let him enter the mountain and sully this pure and holy land?"

Tang Thirty-Six wanted deeply to mention Su Li.

The number of people Su Li had killed was uncountable, his sword stained in far more blood than Xiao Zhang's spear, but did Holy Maiden Peak dare to drive him away?

Even your Holy Maiden left with him.

Just as he was about to say these words, he took them back. These words were too ruthless, and if he didn't say them right, it would end in conflict.

He shook his head and unconcernedly said, "If I remember correctly, before the Holy Maiden secluded herself, she ordered that all matters of South Stream Temple would be managed by Senior Sisters Ping Xuan and Yi Chen. I think that driving Xiao Zhang from Holy Maiden Peak was assuredly not their will, but the will of you three?"

Hearing this, the disciples around the thatched cottage became uneasy, especially those two disciples standing behind the three Daoist nuns, who even lowered their heads. Tang Thirty-Six could clearly sense that these two disciples possessed a powerful cultivation, so they were presumably Ping Xuan and Yi Chen.

Huai Ren knew that she had to respond and serenely said, "Correct, it was my will that Xiao Zhang not enter the mountain."

Tang Thirty-Six stared into her eyes and inquired, "Why?"

Huai Shu angrily said, "I've already said why."

Tang Thirty-Six ignored her. Still staring into Huai Ren's eyes, he questioned, "Then, based on what?"

Even if you gave ten thousand reasons for not allowing Xiao Zhang in, just what authority was it based on?

This is a matter of South Stream Temple. On whose authority are you issuing orders?

Huai Bi sneered, "The Holy Maiden is in seclusion, but does that mean that we seniors can no longer concern ourselves in such matters?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "The Holy Maiden is in seclusion, so that means that you no longer need to respect her decrees? Just who is greater, you or the Holy Maiden?"

His words had ceased to be criticism, becoming a direct challenge.

Huai Bi was infuriated at these questions and prepared to retort.

Huai Ren advised, "Junior Sister, Young Master Tang is well known for his eloquent words. You are certainly not his opponent."

"Wrong." Tang Thirty-Six corrected her, "I am no silver-tongue. I just speak loudly and quickly."

Huai Ren smiled. "One who speaks reason does not need a loud voice. If you just spoke loudly and quickly, why has no one ever been able to win an argument against you?"

"Wrong again." Tang Thirty-Six explained, "One who speaks reason will naturally speak loudly. My reasons are straightforward, so my voice is robust. No one has ever been able to win an argument against me because they do not speak with reason."

His words were naturally referring to the matters of South Stream Temple.

He felt that he had reason, so these three elders of South Stream Temple were naturally without reason.

Silence reigned inside and outside the thatched cottage. The disciples of South Stream Temple lowered their heads, not knowing what to say.

"Young Master Tang feels that we three elders returned to South Stream Temple to avail ourselves of the Holy Maiden's seclusion to seize power."

Huai Ren looked at the disciples and asked, "Perhaps they think the same?"

Hearing this, the hundred-some disciples around the thatched cottage quickly broke their silence to say that they wouldn't dare.

The two disciples attending behind the three nuns even prostrated, their voices shaking as they said, "Student would not dare."

Tang Thirty-Six thought, the two people that Xu Yourong assigned the responsibility of managing the temple are actually this old nun's students. This certainly is a problem. When has a student ever managed their teacher? If the teacher gave an order, was there a disciple that dared to disobey? The crime of deceiving one's teacher or betraying one's ancestor is enough to directly cast one into the abyss for eternity.

"I think that His Holiness the Pope and our guests need not be too worried. The matters of my South Stream Temple have always been managed by its disciples."

Huai Ren warmly said, "But as elders of South Stream Temple, there are some important matters in which we must make our stance known."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Like the matter with Xiao Zhang?"

Huai Ren replied, "What this matter signifies, I think Young Master Tang and Your Eminence understand very well."

This was precisely the question that Tang Thirty-Six had wanted answered.

These three elders of South Stream Temple had refused to protect Xiao Zhang. This meant that they were not willing to have Holy Maiden Peak ally itself with the Li Palace, let alone unify the Orthodoxy's north and south.

Huai Ren looked at Tang Thirty-Six and said, "Even if the Holy Maiden were not in seclusion, I believe that she would also have to consider our stance."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "And your stance is?"

Huai Ren indifferently said, "Our stance is one of opposition."

Tang Thirty-Six fell into thought. He had not expected this elder to have such a calm and firm stance. She simply did not care for his threat or the pressure from the Orthodoxy.

Negotiations had reached an impasse. If things were allowed to continue, the major event that Ye Xiaolian had alluded to might really become reality.

How could this plan be broken? Tang Thirty-Six couldn't think of a way, so he could only use his expertise to stir trouble.

"Since none of you are managing the temple's affairs, why did you have to hit her?"

Tang Thirty-Six pointed at Ye Xiaolian behind him and asked Huai Ren, "Or does the old bullying the young count as one of your important matters?"

The black-clothed Huai Bi flew into a rage, shouting, "I don't manage the temple matters, but with my seniority, am I not allowed to teach this girl to respect her teachers and honor the truth?"

Ye Xiaolian could no longer stand upon seeing her martial grandaunt's rage, and also prostrated. Even if she felt wronged, she did not dare to show it.

Seeing these three disciples prostrating on the floor, Tang Thirty-Six internally sighed. After all, they were girls, and they had grown up under the traditional teachings of Holy Maiden Peak, so it was impossible for them to be like him and Chen Changsheng, daring to bully their teachers and betray their ancestors. There did not seem much of a chance of resolving this problem internally, so he could only hope that Chen Changsheng could think of a method. Given the time that had passed, Chen Changsheng should have already reached the summit of Holy Maiden Peak. No sign of activity after all this time meant that Xu Yourong remained undisturbed in the seclusion of her cave, so it was about time for Chen Changsheng to quickly show himself.

The problem was that with these three elders watching him, it was even a challenge for him to whisper to Ye Xiaolian, so how could he inform Chen Changsheng at the summit?

As he was contemplating these things, his eyes suddenly glowed. In the courtyard, he saw a white crane resting on a flowering tree.

Who couldn't recognize this white crane?

.....

.....

The White Crane was the sacred beast of Holy Maiden Peak. Only Xu Yourong could ride it, and it had a most revered status in Holy Maiden Peak. Whether it was the flowering trees within the temple or the waterfalls trickling between the trees, it could choose anywhere it wanted to make its perch. No one had ever dared to treat it impolitely, but today, it was almost struck by a stinky shoe.

An angry crane cry resounded in the courtyard and its ten-some-zhang wings unfurled. It had just prepared to counterattack when

it suddenly realized that it recognized the thrower of the shoe.

"You heartless thing. We kept watch together for that adulterous couple, but now that I've come to visit, you don't even say hello!"

Tang Thirty-Six stood outside the thatched cottage, his hand holding another straw shoe as he loudly yelled.

Ye Xiaolian and a few other informed disciples were stupefied. Was it because he had thrown a shoe at the White Crane, or was it those old matters he had mentioned?

The White Crane pleaded innocence with its eyes and was probably wondering why this fellow was going crazy.

Tang Thirty-Six grew even angrier and threw the other shoe. At the same time, he cast a glance at the summit and winked.

Chapter 880 – Closing the Temple

The White Crane understood Tang Thirty-Six's meaning. It flapped its wings and soared into the sky, making its way towards the summit of Holy Maiden Peak.

Wind gusted through the courtyard, rustling the blossoming trees. Tang Thirty-Six waved his hand and snatched a few petals in the air, then walked back into the thatched cottage and asked Huai Ren, "We're not Xiao Zhang, so we count as guests, correct?"

Huai Ren knew what he had done but did not expose him. Smiling, she answered, "Those who come from afar are naturally guests."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Since we're guests, why is there no tea?"

Huai Ren remained serene. "Ping Xuan, serve tea."

The South Stream Temple disciple that had been prostrating behind her this entire time now rose and exited the cottage.

As she passed Tang Thirty-Six, Tang Thirty-Six called her to stop and gave her the petals he had just snatched. In a gentle voice, he said, "Sister Ping Xuan, I like to drink scented tea."

At this sight, the three elders and all the disciples present couldn't help but shake their heads as they thought, truly the behavior of a young master; it really makes one feel annoyed.

.....

.....

Even if the water was already boiled, brewing the tea still required some time, and the idle chatter that went along with sipping tea took up even more time.

By the time Tang Thirty-Six was holding his cup of scented tea and discussing Fuchun Province's flatbreads with the senior sister called Ping Xuan, he had bought enough time.

The clear cry of a crane sounded through the sky, and with the howling of the wind, the White Crane slowly descended into the courtyard.

The South Stream Temple disciples were flabbergasted that someone was on the crane. Could the Holy Maiden have come out of her seclusion early?

The rider of the White Crane was not Xu Yourong, but a young man.

Seeing the young man, Ye Xiaolian and many other disciples prostrated. Some of these disciples had not gone to Mount Han and the capital, so they were currently wondering in shock at just who could possibly be able to ride the Holy Maiden's White Crane. Seeing their fellow sisters prostrating and recalling the stories they used to tell, they came to their senses and hurriedly bowed as well.

"Paying respects to His Holiness the Pope."

Chen Changsheng nodded. He spoke a few words to Ye Xiaolian and those other South Stream Temple disciples he was familiar with, then entered the thatched cottage.

Huai Ren and her two martial sisters were already standing, calmly waiting in the cottage for his arrival.

Chen Changsheng apologetically said, "Entering without invitation is truly inappropriate, but my heart was fraught with worry. I ask for your forgiveness."

Huai Ren calmly replied, "Presumably, Your Holiness the Pope had a misunderstanding, thought that South Stream Temple was suffering internal strife, and was concerned for the Holy Maiden's safety, and so went straight to the summit."

Chen Changsheng truly had felt this way at the very start, but it was currently not convenient for him to directly admit to it.

Huai Ren continued, "But South Stream Temple currently has a grand announcement to make to the world. Your Holiness the Pope

has happened to arrive just in time, adding to its glory. I thank Your Holiness for the visit."

These words made Tang Thirty-Six feel a creak in his heart. He knew that this was the major event that Ye Xiaolian had been concerned about.

Chen Changsheng somewhat gravely asked, "What announcement is this?"

Huai Ren said with a most tranquil expression, as if discussing a most routine and trifling matter, "South Stream Temple intends to close the temple after the conclusion of the new year's festivities."

Hearing this, Ping Xuan, Yi Chen, and the other second-generation disciples felt a slight shock run through their bodies. They turned to Huai Ren, wanting to say something, but ultimately chose to remain silent.

Ye Xiaolian and the other young girls of South Stream Temple showed unwilling expressions, but they also did not speak.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat puzzled by these words.

Wasn't Xu Yourong currently secluded in the cave at the summit? Who else wanted to go through closing the temple?

And then he recalled a certain passage he had read in the book 'Miscellaneous Stories of the Southern Altar'.

There were three ways in which South Stream Temple closed the temple.

If a cultivator of South Stream Temple entered seclusion, this could be called closing the temple.

All of South Stream Temple could go through closing the temple, in a similar way to a cultivator entering seclusion.

During the days in which the temple was closed, South Stream Temple would not interact with the outside world, and the seals and arrays of Holy Maiden Peak would activate. One could

consider it as being cut off from the world.

Chen Changsheng looked into Huai Ren's eyes and asked, "The closing of the temple Your Reverence speaks of... is cutting off South Stream Temple from the world?"

Huai Ren seemed numb to the emotion in his eyes, and she calmly replied, "Correct."

The thatched cottage was quiet for a very long time.

Chen Changsheng walked to the door, looking out at the beautiful scenery outside. He asked, "For how long?"

Huai Ren walked behind him and softly said, "Ten years."

Hearing this, the disciples of South Stream Temple remained as downcast as before. It was obvious that they already knew of this.

Ten years..." Chen Changsheng muttered to himself.

The lives of cultivators far surpassed ordinary people, and living two hundred or three hundred years was very normal. Cultivators of lofty cultivation could even live from six hundred to one thousand years.

In the span of such long lives, ten years was a very brief moment of time—one's youthful face would not turn old, and one's hair would remain free of white.

But to these young girls of South Stream Temple, being cut off from the world for ten years was still very difficult to accept.

They could only see the clouds of Holy Maiden Peak, but not the clouds of the world outside. They could only see the flowering trees of the plateau, but not the flowering trees of the outside world.

They could only see each other. It was impossible for them to see the people outside.

If one did not consider these things, but considered this matter from Chen Changsheng's view, then if South Stream Temple

closed the temple for ten years, the Li Palace would lose its strongest external ally for ten years.

He finally understood the reason for the diplomatic mission from the Imperial Court that Xiao Zhang had spoken of in Fengyang City.

Who was most willing to see South Stream Temple close its temple for ten years? His teacher Shang Xingzhou, of course, and also everyone else in the Great Zhou Imperial Court.

The Prince of Xiang and Wuqiong Bi, two experts of the Divine Domain, had personally come with the diplomatic mission to ensure that this matter could proceed smoothly.

Deducing from these points, one could conclude that these three elders of South Stream Temple had suddenly concluded their travels, returned to the mountain, and forcefully demanded that South Stream Temple be closed due to the influence of Shang Xingzhou and the Imperial Court.

Thinking of this, he glanced at Hu Thirty-Two and thought, with such a major event taking place at South Stream Temple, why has the Orthodoxy not heard anything about it?

Hu Thirty-Two gave an imperceptible nod, using his eyes to indicate that he would investigate.

Those were all matters for afterward. The most pressing matter at the moment was to change the minds of these three martial grandaunts of South Stream Temple.

"Can we speak alone?" Chen Changsheng asked Huai Ren.

Huai Ren replied, "Everything is as Your Holiness desires."

.....

.....

The sun was setting behind the mountains.

The graceful ridges of the mountain through which the Tong

River ran were very high, so the sun quickly touched them, making it seem rather like twilight.

Chen Changsheng stood on the edge of the cliff, gazing at the distant setting sun. He was silent, his thoughts inscrutable.

"Yes, it truly was the venerable Daoist master who sent someone to find us, and then personally convinced us to end our wanderings early."

Huai Ren stood beside him, her face, still young and beautiful, seemingly plated with a layer of gold in the light of the setting sun, making her appear abnormally dignified and holy.

"To the disciples, being cut off the world is truly difficult to accept, and presumably the Holy Maiden would disagree as well, but I still insist."

Huai Ren turned to face him and calmly said, "Your Holiness, you should know that there are three levels of closing the temple. A cultivator closing the temple means that they are entering seclusion, the temple itself going through the closing means being cut off from the world, but the very first meaning of closing the temple was South Stream Temple and the Li Palace [uniting as one](#). If I do not want that last event to occur, I can only choose the second."

Chen Changsheng replied, "'Idling by the South Stream's Window', written by the first Holy Maiden, described this last form of closing the temple. Her words clearly stated that although South Stream Temple was created by her, she still hoped that it could ultimately reunite with the Orthodoxy. What I and Yourong want to do is completely in accord with her thinking. How is it inappropriate?"

"That is a matter from countless years ago, and time can change many things. South Stream Temple now has its own lineage, so why should it end this lineage and unite with the Li Palace? Crucially, if all goes according to Your Holiness and the Holy

Maiden's will, South Stream Temple is very likely to step into an abyss of destruction."

Huai Ren looked into his eyes, calmly and firmly declaring, "I cannot simply watch as Your Holiness and the Holy Maiden bring South Stream Temple into this war."

'合' can mean 'close', but it can also mean 'combine/merge'. This same '合' is also the 'unity' of the Unity Sword Art.

Chapter 881 – A Conversation That Will Be Recorded in the Annals of History

Chen Changsheng said, "I have never thought about putting South Stream Temple in danger."

"Your Holiness, I understand you. If this were three years ago, I would put absolute trust in Your Holiness's words, but just as I said, time can change many things."

Huai Ren sorrowfully said, "After three years, Your Holiness has changed. If so many people had not died in the snowy mountains, if Linghai Zhiwang had not gone to the Mount Song Army headquarters, if Your Holiness had not gone to Wenshui City, if Your Holiness were not standing next to me right now, I perhaps would have believed Your Holiness. Now, however, I cannot."

"All the continent knows what Your Holiness intends to do."

"From the Mount Song Army headquarters to Wenshui City, Your Holiness intends to seize the venerable Daoist and the Imperial Court's allies outside the capital and bring them under Your Holiness's banner. Your Holiness has even succeeded in changing the Tang clan's stance, so how can Your Holiness let Holy Maiden Peak go?"

"Did Your Holiness ever think about why, though everyone knew what Your Holiness intended, the venerable Daoist has never attempted to stop Your Holiness? Because he does not need to care, because when you were attempting to cut off his limbs, his gaze had fallen on this place several years, on Holy Maiden Peak, the place that should have been Your Holiness's strongest ally."

Chen Changsheng quietly listened, making no attempt to reply.

"The rebellion of a student might not see success in a lifetime. Even if Your Holiness persists until the end, the human world will fracture, and the demons will avail themselves of the chaos to

invade. When that time comes, how can Your Holiness confront the destitute and suffering believers, confront the bones on the side of the road, confront the past Popes of the Orthodoxy? Give up. I have spoken with the venerable Daoist in the capital. He has promised me that as long as you are willing to give up the throne of the Pope, you can cultivate in South Stream Temple or Mount Li as you please, your safety assured."

Huai Ren gazed at him as a senior would gaze at a junior, yearning to hear the answer she wanted to hear.

Chen Changsheng serenely replied, "I cannot accept your request."

Huai Ren felt somewhat disappointed. "Why do you insist on opposing your teacher?"

From that moment three years ago when he carried the Tianhai Divine Empress's body down from the Mausoleum of Books, this was a question that many people wanted to know the answer to.

Linghai Zhiwang, Daoist Siyuan, the Cong Province Army headquarters, and even the Mount Li Sword Sect had reasons to be wary and hostile towards the Imperial Court and Shang Xingzhou, but Chen Changsheng did not.

Whether one viewed Shang Xingzhou through the lens of history, or from the standpoint of the common people or the officials, there was nothing that could be criticized about him.

It was true that the methods he used before and after the Mausoleum of Books were very harsh, but anyone who aspired to succeed at great undertakings would have done the same.

He truly had used Zhou Tong, but when Zhou Tong died, he had issued an imperial decree charging Zhou Tong with ten-some crimes.

If a war was inevitable between teacher and disciples, Chen Changsheng would never be able to stand on the side of justice, no

matter what.

But as he had once said to his martial uncle the Pope, his teacher would not let him live, so he had to oppose him.

As time passed, many things changed, but he knew that this matter had not.

The battle in the mountains and those ruins that had once been a lake and garden were the clearest proof of this.

If it was just this reason, he still had no right, no reason, to bring the entire Orthodoxy, the Mount Song Army headquarters, the Cong Province Army headquarters, the Tang clan, the Mount Li Sword Sect, Holy Maiden Peak, and perhaps the entire continent into this assuredly bitter conflict. As Huai Ren said, he could not do this, even if he was the Pope, the most authoritative figure on the continent.

Of course, Chen Changsheng was unwilling to see this sight as well.

But he knew that if he did not want this sight to become reality, he needed to prepare as if it really was going to happen.

Concessions and compromise could not obtain true peace—they were surrender. The truth that had been obtained after so many years of war with the demons had seemingly been forgotten by many humans.

He was currently the Pope, so he had to bear the appropriate responsibility for the Orthodoxy, for all of the human world.

"If everyone thinks this way of me, then everyone is wrong."

On the distant plains, the winding thread of the Tong River was growing dimmer and dimmer. Chen Changsheng looked in that direction and calmly said, "I do not do these things so that I can obtain supreme authority, or because I am obsessed with killing him for my own safety. Even though he's tried to kill me so many times, I still have never thought about killing him. It's not because

he's my master, but because I also know, as you know, that if I were to kill him, the entire continent would be plunged into chaos. I do these things only to ensure that the Orthodoxy has the ability to serve as a counterweight to the Imperial Court."

Huai Ren asked, "This being the case, why does Your Holiness want the Orthodoxy to serve as a counterweight to the Imperial Court?"

Chen Changsheng explained, "Martial Uncle once said to me that kind people need to be even more on their guard... Being on guard requires the corresponding ability, or else it will be nothing more than a joke."

Huai Ren understood his meaning and sighed.

"Holy Maiden Peak is in the distant south, but the Li Palace is in the capital, very close to the Imperial Palace. We must bear this responsibility. Just like when the Tianhai Divine Empress reigned, if not for Martial Uncle, just who could know how many houses would have been knocked over by the fierce waves of tyranny, how many innocents would have been drowned away?"

Chen Changsheng declared, "Right now, the Imperial Court needs a strength that can counteract it. Right now, Master requires an existence that can threaten him. Otherwise, the Imperial Court will begin to act wantonly, and Master will become a monster. Martial Uncle chose me to be the Pope precisely because he knew that only I could lead the people of the Orthodoxy in playing this role."

Huai Ren noted, "But what Your Holiness has done has already surpassed being on guard and become preparations for war."

"I was still on guard at the Mount Song Army headquarters and the Tang clan, just giving a warning."

Chen Changsheng said, "If the Imperial Court and Master have made a mistake and not corrected it, I and the Orthodoxy will

correct it for them."

Huai Ren questioned, "By correcting, Your Holiness means killing people and seizing power?"

Chen Changsheng said, "Killing people is because people like Ning Shiwei, Zhu Ye, and Tianhai Zhanyi are people that should be killed, and the Tang Second Master colluded with the demons, which was even more deserving of death. Seizing power is because the Orthodoxy requires authority. More importantly, the Imperial Court and Master have already proved that their candidates have no right to hold this authority."

Huai Ren looked into his eyes and asked, "And if the Imperial Court continues to make mistakes? If the venerable Daoist persists in these methods?"

Chen Changsheng thought for a only a few moments before replying, "Then I can only think of ways to overturn this Imperial Court of his."

Huai Ren sighed. "In the end, you still return to this beaten track of cruelty."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Different roads might end up merging, but the reasons for starting the journey are not at all the same."

Huai Ren wondered, "If one ultimately reaches the same end, is the reason one started important?"

"There is a large difference between killing in self-defense and killing while committing robbery, and a very important one. I must believe that I am correct."

Chen Changsheng said a phrase that he had not said for three years: "Because I cultivate the Dao of following my heart."

In this moment where the sun had set behind the mountains but the stars had not completely revealed their true forms, the mountains of the south experienced their duskiest moment.

The flowering trees on the edge of the cliff swayed in the wind, seemingly astonished that it had become so quiet.

After some time, Huai Ren replied, "This is Your Holiness's Dao, Your Holiness's war. Must Your Holiness bring Holy Maiden Peak into it after so many years of peace?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "I think that this is a matter for Yourong and the disciples of South Stream Temple to decide."

Chapter 882 – The Imperial Court's Diplomatic Mission Arrives

Huai Ren had failed to convince Chen Changsheng.

Similarly, Chen Changsheng had failed to convince this martial grandaunt of South Stream Temple.

Huai Ren said, "You should know well that the Holy Maiden will not be able to come out of this seclusion for some time. It might be ten years, twenty, or even longer."

Chen Changsheng truly did know this. The letter Xu Yourong had written to him had clearly explained everything.

Holy Maiden Peak required a true Holy Maiden, as only this way could it maintain its hallowed status in the Orthodoxy and the south.

At the same time, the Orthodoxy also needed a true Holy Maiden, as only this way could it have a greater right to speak in this conflict with the Imperial Court.

The south also needed a true Holy Maiden, as only this way could it reverse the disadvantage in Divine Domain experts that resulted from Su Li's leaving with the previous Holy Maiden.

If Chen Changsheng was able to enter the Divine Domain, he would be able to resolve many problems.

But he was the Pope, needed to lead the Orthodoxy and its millions of believers.

Holy Maiden Peak was in the distant south and had comparatively fewer matters to manage. She had more time and energy than Chen Changsheng.

Thus, Xu Yourong had decided to enter seclusion and charge towards that high, high threshold, striving to enter the Divine Domain in the shortest time possible.

In the records of history, the vast majority of Divine Domain cultivators had only been able to do so after several centuries of cultivation, an example of this being the Elder of Heavenly Secrets.

Even true geniuses of unsurpassed talent, such as Bie Yanghong, required a hundred-some years of bitter cultivation.

If one only examined the past thousand years, disregarding those even more ancient eras, the fastest people to enter the Divine Domain were Zhou Dufu, Chen Xuanba, Emperor Taizong, and Su Li. However, whether it was Su Li, Zhou Dufu, or Wang Po, it was only after the age of forty that they had managed to see those inexplicable mysteries of the heavens.

Even Chen Xuanba, whose talent was rumored to be high enough to shake the sea of stars, had only had a chance to cross that threshold at the age of thirty.

Xu Yourong had the blood of the Heavenly Phoenix and was unquestionably one of the most talented and gifted cultivators in history, but she could not be stronger than these legends of the past.

From these facts, one could conclude that in her charge to the Divine Domain, her seclusion would last at least ten years, even if she was just as much of a genius as Chen Xuanba.

"You say that this matter requires the Holy Maiden to make a decision, but she cannot exit her seclusion, so what can be done? South Stream Temple will still have to confront this question."

Huai Ren continued, "I do not have the wisdom to make this choice, so I will have South Stream Temple close for ten years and wait for the Holy Maiden to leave her seclusion and make a decision."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Your Reverence should also know what she would choose if she were not in seclusion."

Huai Ren answered, "Even if the Holy Maiden agreed, I would

still think of a way to prevent Holy Maiden Peak from being a vanguard in the Orthodoxy's war against the Imperial Court."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Could it be that Your Reverence has not realized that of the several hundred disciples of South Stream Temple, not a single one supports your decision?"

Huai Ren fell quiet for a while, then said, "That is because they are still young and have no idea of the terrors of war."

Chen Changsheng said, "The Daoist Canon clearly describes the difference between wanting to fight and fearing a fight. I do not want to repeat it."

Huai Ren replied, "I have also already clearly stated South Stream Temple's stance and have no desire to repeat it."

Darkness suddenly descended, the ten-some mountains becoming as black as ink.

At the most crucial and tensest moment of this negotiation, the blossoming trees were suddenly illuminated by lanterns. Ping Xuan, accompanied by several disciples, quickly hurried over.

Ping Xuan bowed to Chen Changsheng, then said to Huai Ren, "Master, a message was sent from the base of the mountain saying that the Imperial Court's diplomatic mission has arrived."

Chen Changsheng's expression turned slightly grave. He had not expected the Imperial Court's people to come so quickly.

Huai Ren asked, "Who is leading the diplomatic mission?"

Ping Xuan replied, "The Prince of Xiang."

Huai Ren appeared unmoved by the Prince of Xiang's name, but she inwardly felt relieved.

She had risked the Li Palace's rage to push this matter of closing the temple, and taken on an enormous pressure. This conversation with Chen Changsheng had also thoroughly exhausted her. Now, the Imperial Court's diplomatic mission had arrived, and it was led

by the Prince of Xiang, who had just entered the Divine Domain. Presumably, they could relieve South Stream Temple of some of its burden.

Chen Changsheng found it rather strange that he had not heard Wuqiong Bi's name.

Huai Ren had asked who was leading the diplomatic mission, but if Wuqiong Bi were also present, a capable disciple like Ping Xuan would certainly have mentioned this important point.

No matter how detestable Wuqiong Bi's personality was, she was still an expert of the Divine Domain, the number of which could be counted with one's fingers. If she had not been mentioned, it could only mean that she was not with the diplomatic mission.

Outside Wenshui City, and when Xiao Zhang had seen them, Wuqiong Bi and the Prince of Xiang had been together, but where had she gone now?

Soon after, even more news was sent from the mountain gate.

The Longevity Sect's representative had come, as had the Mutuo clan's and the Wu clan's. The Vice Principal of Scholartree Manor had also arrived, as had representatives from all the other great sects of the south.

"Forgive me, Your Holiness. I must go down the mountain to welcome them."

Huai Ren apologized to Chen Changsheng, then left the cliff.

Others of South Stream Temple remained to take care of Chen Changsheng's party, led by the purple-clothed nun Huai Shu.

From her appearance, one could see that this Daoist nun had a very violent personality, but when she guided Chen Changsheng's party, she did not speak a single word.

Given Chen Changsheng's status, South Stream Temple naturally had to give him the best treatment, opening to him the most

exalted building in the temple.

Ye Xiaolian and several other disciples were busy tidying the furnishings of the room. Tang Thirty-Six stood on the side, directing their movements, but not lending a single helping hand.

"This courtyard has not been opened in many years and is inevitably somewhat dusty. I ask that Your Holiness wait for a few moments."

Huai Shu added, "Because it has been many years since a Pope has visited Holy Maiden Peak."

Chen Changsheng said, "I request Your Reverence's guidance."

"The Orthodoxy is the Daoist faith, but the Daoist faith is not the Orthodoxy. At the very least, Holy Maiden Peak has never enjoyed the Orthodoxy's favor, so no matter what our fellow believers in the capital might think, no matter how the scriptures of the church described that schism, the Li Palace has never thought highly of us."

Huai Shu looked at him and asked, "Now that the Li Palace is in danger and requires us, Your Holiness has come to us. Does Your Holiness think this is appropriate?"

.....

.....

The night gradually deepened. After dinner, Chen Changsheng stood in the courtyard, gazing in the direction of the Tong River. He quietly looked at that barely visible belt of silver, then said, "There's no need to rush the investigation. The first priority is to stop the closing of the temple. If these three elders remain steadfast, we can promise to not mention the matter of unification."

Quite some time had passed since they had left Wenshui City and come to Holy Maiden Peak, but the Li Palace had still not received any news on the return of these three martial grandaunts and the

major event that was the closing of the temple. This was an incredibly worrying matter. It seemed that Daoist Baishi's sudden death was not able to resolve all problems.

Hu Thirty-Two left to carry out his order. He had the means to transmit Chen Changsheng's decree as quickly as possible to the capital and the nearby churches. When he returned to the courtyard, he had already obtained the most recent intelligence. Just an hour ago, the representative of the Li Palace had finally arrived at the base of Holy Maiden Peak. Apparently, Mao Qiuyu had sent this person over on very short notice.

This news was slightly relieving to Chen Changsheng, but there was still a problem that he could not understand: where had Wuqiong Bi gone?

Tang Thirty-Six also found it very strange. "That old Daoist nun loves to participate in events like these. There's no reason for her to leave mid-journey."

Chen Changsheng thought of the unease he felt when he stood in front of the stone wall at the summit. His mood turned gloomier, and he found it hard to sit still, so he walked out of the courtyard.

Chapter 883 – The Surging of the River Also Cannot Wash Away This Hatred

Because of Chen Changsheng's visit and the arrivals of the Imperial Court's diplomatic mission and the representatives of the various factions, South Stream Temple was under heavy guard today. On the plateau, disciples were standing guard in the flowering trees, and one could faintly sense several dozen sword intents in the vicinity of the path, waiting to be activated. If an external foe were to come, the sword array would assuredly be able to activate in the shortest time possible.

When those South Stream Temple disciples saw him, they bowed, one of them asking, "Where is Your Holiness going?"

As this girl asked her question, the other disciples all smirked at him, presumably having already guessed at his destination.

Chen Changsheng thanked them for their troubles and, somewhat embarrassed, pointed at the summit. "I'm going over there to take a look."

The forest resounded with the laughter of these disciples, clear and pleasant, like the song of nightingales.

It was truly difficult to imagine that if the temple really did close itself off for ten years, this clear and moving laughter would no longer be heard. This would truly be the world's misfortune.

.....

.....

On this journey to the summit, Chen Changsheng was naturally no longer willing to climb the mountain again. Wind blew through the forest, causing the flowers to sway, exuding their aroma to the surroundings. The White Crane flapped its wings and took flight, quickly reaching the summit.

Chen Changsheng walked to the stone wall and pulled aside the vines. He silently stood there for a long time, but, failing to calm his mind, turned and left.

The Luomei Mountains were formed from countless peaks, with the Holy Maiden Peak being the highest. Here, the mountains were the closest to the night sky, the light of the countless stars somewhat dazzling.

He had once gone to that solitary mountain in the Cloud Grave. He had reached a very high altitude, but he had been surrounded by clouds, so he had never seen such bright stars.

Starlight enveloped the summit like water, clearly illuminating the lines on the stone monoliths.

Chen Changsheng gazed at those monolith inscriptions, comparing them to the monolith inscriptions in the Mausoleum of Books, slowly comprehending.

Time slowly passed, and on this solemn starry night, he woke from his meditation. Walking to the cliff, he glanced at the distant foot of the mountain.

He saw the light of countless lanterns, appearing just like the stars, but much dimmer. These were presumably the Imperial Court's diplomatic mission and the representatives from the noble clans and great sects.

South Stream Temple truly wanted to cut itself off from the world for ten years? After seeing the Heavenly Tome Monolith rubbings and touching upon the wisdom of the first Holy Maiden, he wasn't even thinking of this question. Instead, he took out another book related to the temple sword and began to read, just like he had done yesterday afternoon. Gradually, a fierce sword intent appeared by the cliff.

This sword intent originated from his fingers and fell on the distant sky of stars and the earth of the mortal world.

.....

.....

The Tong River arose from the depths of the Luomei Mountains, flowed past Holy Maiden Peak, and merged with the River of Hatred, which flowed west, cleaving through another mountain range and entering a canyon.

In the canyon, twenty-some li from Fengyang City, the dark river surged with a thunderous momentum.

On a rock in the river, two people suddenly appeared. No matter how frightening the force of the water, it was not worth the attention of these two people.

Because they were true experts who had the right to disregard the force of nature, and also because their hearts were currently fraught with worry and anxiety.

One was a Daoist nun dressed in a deep-blue Daoist robe. Her eyes were slightly sunken and lifeless. Her face was pale and utterly devoid of her usual viciousness. It was Wuqiong Bi.

Bie Yanghong was still dressed as a scholar, but his usual composed and indifferent visage now appeared much graver, and one could faintly see a tinge of sorrow.

"It can't be true, it can't be true, my beloved child must have been naughty... and accidentally broke it."

Wuqiong Bi was muttering to herself, her face growing paler and paler, her eyes dimmer and dimmer. She found that she could not deceive herself.

Bie Yanghong's gaze suddenly fell on a certain place in the river. His pupils constricted, a glint of harsh light flashing in them. The red flower floating around his pinkie finger flew through the air.

Boom! The river was torn open, its waters surging into the night sky like a waterfall in reverse.

An unimaginable strength had blasted through the water's surface and created a hole around half a zhang in radius, so deep that one could see the damp mud of the river bottom.

Wuqiong Bi shrieked and lunged towards the hole. She hovered three feet above the water and looked within.

With just a glance, she nearly fell unconscious. If not for Bie Yanghong's prompt arrival, she might have fallen into the river.

The bottom of the hole was naught but mud. One would not detect anything strange with just one's eyes, but given the cultivation levels of Wuqiong Bi and Bie Yanghong, coupled with the link forged by blood, they naturally noticed a problem.

In this mud were a few extremely fine grains of ice. Crucially, these grains of ice still carried extremely faint remnants of Qi.

This Qi was the brand on Bie Tianxin's soul that Wuqiong Bi and Bie Yanghong had personally planted in their son's sea of consciousness before he went traveling.

Wuqiong Bi sensed this ever-weakening Qi, her body fiercely trembling in her monstrous wrath. She began to sob in grief.

"Just who is so vicious! I'll kill you! Who is it!"

Her grief-stricken sobs echoed off both walls of the canyon. A gale suddenly kicked up, flattening the forests, sending the apes and monkeys fleeing. Countless pillars of water suddenly shot up from the river, killing innumerable fish.

A look of profound grief appeared on Bie Yanghong's face, but he was far more cool-headed than his wife. His sleeve lightly waved, taking in those ice crystals at the bottom of the river.

Only ten-some grains remained of the ice crystals, each of them about the size of a bean. If they had been just a little later, just a few more hours, the river would have melted these ice crystals away. The Qi would have dispersed, so utterly swallowed by the river that even Divine Domain experts like them would have found

it impossible to sense.

The criminal was truly a most methodical and scheming individual.

When she thought of this, Wuqiong Bi felt even more rage.

Bie Yanghong's expression suddenly turned grave, as he had sensed an extremely cold Qi from these ice crystals.

Wuqiong Bi was in a fury, so she sensed it somewhat later. Her expression quickly morphed, her eyes so filled with hate that they seemed about to bite someone.

"Black Dragon! Chen Changsheng!"

People like them could naturally determine that what had killed Bie Tianxin and destroyed almost all evidence of his body was the Deep Freeze Dragon Breath of the Black Frost Dragons.

All the world knew that the Dragon race had not stepped onto the continent for one thousand years. And only truly important people knew that the only dragon on the continent at present was the current Pope's Protector, the Black Frost Dragon that had been imprisoned under New North Bridge for more than six centuries.

If that Black Frost Dragon had killed Bie Tianxin, then it was probably related to Chen Changsheng.

Bie Yanghong thought for a few moments, then said, "Wait for me here. I will continue to investigate."

So saying, he left the river and appeared at some other place in the canyon. He roused a fisherman and asked what had happened in the last few days.

If one fisherman didn't know, he awakened another. After an hour, he finally found a fisherman who said that he had seen something strange take place on the river.

Some green-winged monster had snatched up a person and flown over the river.

"Nanke! That Demon Princess!" Wuqiong Bi hollered, her eyes red. "Chen Changsheng has kept her at his side all this time; who doesn't know this? He holds a grudge against my son. They met in the mountains, and with no one around, he murdered him! He will pay with his life!"

Bie Yanghong had an exhausted expression, remaining silent.

He felt that something was not right.

In this canyon river far from civilization, why had his son encountered Chen Changsheng's party?

Such a probability was simply far too small.

After a while, he and Wuqiong Bi went to Fengyang City. They learned of the tea party that would be held here tomorrow, as well as the events of the daytime.

Xiao Zhang had visited.

Chen Changsheng had truly been here.

Chapter 884 – Meeting Old Friends at the Summit

"My beloved son enjoyed tea culture, so came to this place."

Wuqiong Bi stared into her husband's eyes as if she was staring at her foe. She hatefully spat, "What do you still need to investigate? What more evidence do you need? Or is it that you still can't believe that the His Holiness the Pope you so admire has killed your son? Or is that you don't even dare to take vengeance for your son, so are doing your best to explain things for him?"

Bie Yanghong still said nothing. Turning around, he entered a restaurant by the river.

He knew that his son had stopped here for some time, and he wanted to know what had happened.

But regretfully, there was no one he could ask.

The restaurant was full of corpses.

He quickly left the restaurant. Relying on the sliver of heavenly mystery that he had forcefully calculated, he found his target on a boat in the river used for transporting tea.

That person did not give him a chance to ask any questions. The moment they saw him flying through the air, they took in poison and died, their face carrying a wretched, despairing, and bizarre smile.

Bie Yanghong recognized this person.

Priest Xin of the Hall of Announcements had played a very important role in the revival of the Orthodox Academy.

As he gazed at Priest Xin's corpse, Bie Yanghong maintained his silence.

Wuqiong Bi angrily yelled, "What are you still waiting for? Better

to quickly kill Chen Changsheng!"

Bie Yanghong's silence persisted for yet longer, and then he finally said, "Chen Changsheng is the Pope."

"And just what is the Pope? Are you afraid?"

Wuqiong Bi wept and cried, "I am not afraid! I'll butcher that black dragon... I'll rip out her muscles! Peel off her skin!"

.....

.....

South Stream Temple wanted to close the temple for ten years, cutting itself off from the world?

This news was certain to shake the entire continent, but for the moment, it had not been spread very far. The Imperial Court's diplomatic mission and those great sects and noble clans who had arrived at Holy Maiden Peak last night had been informed of this matter in advance. They had naturally made ample preparations to assist the three martial grandaunts of South Stream Temple in resisting the pressure of the Orthodoxy.

The Imperial Court's diplomatic mission was led by the Prince of Xiang. This prince had broken into the Divine Domain not too long ago and was currently at the peak of his strength. In addition, the Old Lady of the Mutuo clan and the head of the Wu clan had also personally come. The Longevity Sect had sent one elder and several disciples, and then if one also took into account small sects like Gentle Stream Monastery, Singing Water Temple, and the Blazing Sun Sect, there were around one thousand people in attendance.

The Li Palace's response was far inferior. They had only sent a bishop from a missionary church located in the south. Scholartree Manor and Mount Li were closer, so although they had learned of the news a little late, they arrived at the same time, alleviating the situation slightly. Scholartree Manor had sent one of its vice

principals and disciples like Zhong Hui. On the other hand, the Sect Master of the Mount Li Sword Sect needed to stabilize his cultivation, and the experts of the Sword Hall were still on the northern border so as to intimidate the demon experts, so Mount Li had sent Gou Hanshi and ten-some other disciples. Gou Hanshi was only a second-generation disciple, but he had a very steady personality, was well-versed in the Daoist Canon, had a vast store of knowledge, and was profoundly skilled in the sword. Many people were quite optimistic about his future, especially since Qiushan Jun had now been missing for five years, making him the most likely candidate to be the next Sect Master.

This was the liveliest Holy Maiden Peak had been in several decades. This could truly be called the grandest occasion on the continent after the celebration of the confluence of the north and south.

The location of the ceremony for closing the temple was not in front of South Stream Temple, but at the summit of another mountain. This mountain was incredibly special, as its summit was a large stone plateau, extremely spacious and smooth as a mirror. It was possible to fit several thousand people on this plateau, with plenty of space to spare, which made those sects who had sent a smaller number of representatives stand out even more—for instance, the archbishop of the Orthodoxy's southern church and his attending priests, who had only arrived this morning.

The Li Palace and Holy Maiden Peak both belonged to the Orthodoxy, but for such a grand occasion, the Li Palace had only sent this small number of people. Many people saw that there was something wrong with this. Whether in the edicts of the Imperial Court or in private conversations, the Li Palace had clearly been intentionally left out in the preparations for South Stream Temple's ceremony. The first explanation given by the three martial grandaunts of South Stream Temple and the Imperial Court's diplomatic mission was that the Pope was not in the Li

Palace, so it was difficult to give him a timely invitation. Everyone knew that this was an excuse, but the problem was that not a single important personage of the Li Palace appeared. What was going on here?

Gou Hanshi gazed silently at the distant mountain path shrouded in clouds, then said to his junior brothers, "It seems that there's no chance of recovering from today's event."

The Mount Li Sword Sect disciples all became rather gloomy.

Mount Li and Holy Maiden Peak were not far from each other, and there were even some mountains of these sects that were only separated by a river. The disciples of the two sects were very familiar with each other and regarded themselves as being under the same sect. Now that they knew that they would be separated from their martial sisters for ten years, they found it hard not to feel frustrated, no matter how clean their sword hearts were.

Everyone agreed with Gou Hanshi's opinion that there was no means of altering the closing of South Stream Temple. Because Xu Yourong was in seclusion, and because the Li Palace, the only power that could resist the Imperial Court and all these factions, had clearly been caught unprepared for some reason and not sent a single important personage.

Thus, when the thousand-some cultivators at the plateau suddenly saw the Pope walk out of the clouds, they were shocked to the extreme.

.....

.....

The sea of people became a tide of people prostrating.

The tide of people calmed into a sea of people, the thousand-some cultivators finishing their bows and asked to return to their seats by the gentle voice of South Stream Temple's Martial Grandaunt Huai Ren.

The ten-some people from Scholartree Manor were seated not far from the Mount Li Sword Sect.

Before, these two unflinching factions of peculiar temperaments had never been able to see eye to eye and would have never sat together. However, after the matter of Xunyang City and Wang Po's breakthrough in the capital's Luo River, Scholartree Manor was no longer so humble, the Mount Li Sword Sect no longer so boastful. The two sides began to get along a little better so that they would at the very least not fight.

"The Imperial Court must have been dreaming. Did they really think that they could keep the Li Palace out of a major event like this?"

The Vice Principal of Scholartree Manor looked at the distant Prince of Xiang and jeered, "Didn't they think about the relationship between His Holiness the Pope and the Holy Maiden? How could the matters of South Stream Temple be hidden from him?"

After saying this, he cast a glance at the Mount Li Sword Sect's party.

These simple words had simultaneously ridiculed the Imperial Court and the Mount Li Sword Sect. Scholartree Manor's stature in the south had risen so quickly that it had truly become quite bold.

Zhong Hui had a rather dreary personality, but he did not think the same as his vice principal and had no idea that those words were meant to shame Mount Li. He asked, "Is that rumor true?"

"You should have personally witnessed what happened at Mount Han. When His Holiness the Pope was injured by Guan Bai, just who went to save him? And on the journey from Mount Han to the capital, just how many eyes were watching? His Holiness and the Holy Maiden ate and drank together, slept and lived together, just like Daoist companions."

The Vice Principal of Scholartree Manor sneered, "Who knows what the Imperial Court was thinking with the closing of South Stream Temple, but since His Holiness has arrived, this matter isn't guaranteed to succeed."

The Prince of Xiang was seated on the eastern end of the plateau, very far from Scholartree Manor's position, so he naturally did not hear. With a normal expression, he chatted with the Mutuo clan's Old Lady and the head of the Wu clan.

But Gou Hanshi and the other disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect could hear those words loud and clear, and their expressions became somewhat unnatural.

Chapter 885 – The Grand Ceremony Begins

The Eldest Brother of the Mount Li Sword Sect, Qiushan Jun, had vanished for five years and only recently returned to the mountain, the reason for which no one knew.

Gou Hanshi bitterly smiled and shook his head, thinking, Scholartree Manor still can't stand to be in the inferior position and want to use this matter to gain some advantages. In what way is this similar to Wang Po?

At this moment, he sensed that someone was looking at him. He turned to face this person, froze for a moment, then faintly smiled and bowed.

Chen Changsheng smiled and returned the bow. Now that he thought about it, it had been almost four years since he had last seen Gou Hanshi, and there were times when he would miss him.

South Stream Temple exalted the southern direction, so he sat on the high platform on the south face of the plateau, only ten-some zhang from where the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect were seated. However, it was inconvenient for him to rise and go over.

He noticed a somewhat clumsy-looking and naive youth at Gou Hanshi's side, and then looked at Gou Hanshi with a curious gaze.

All the other Mount Li Sword Sect disciples were standing behind Gou Hanshi, with only that youth sitting on the same row as Gou Hanshi. It was clear that he had a rather high status in the sect.

Gou Hanshi had the youth stand up, and then he introduced, "Sixth Junior Brother, Bai Cai."

Chen Changsheng came to know that this was the only member of the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws that he had not yet met. He gave a warm smile and nodded.

However, Bai Cai kept his head held high, his face carrying a stubborn and aloof expression as he completely ignored Chen

Changsheng. Even Gou Hanshi's increasingly stern gaze failed to make him lower his head.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat puzzled, then realized what was wrong and felt rather helpless.

He suddenly felt that Bai Cai's name sounded rather familiar, and then he remembered that that fellow's alias was Luo Bu... which made him feel even more helpless.

[Radish and cabbage](#) — that fellow truly was lazy, or perhaps easygoing.

.....

.....

Chen Changsheng might have felt inconvenienced, but Tang Thirty-Six had never felt anything to be inconvenient in his entire life, and walked straight over to the Mount Li Sword Sect disciples.

Seeing him come over, all the people from the sects seated in this area began to rise and bow. Some knew his identity, while others had been reminded by the people seated near them.

Tang Thirty-Six waved his hand, indicating that he understood. He walked up to Gou Hanshi and asked, "Did that fellow come back?"

Gou Hanshi knew that he was asking about Guan Feibai and said, "He only got back two days ago. Oh, and congratulations."

The struggle over the succession of the Tang clan, Tang Thirty-Six's imprisonment in the ancestral hall for half a year, and the ensuing events had already been spread to the entire continent.

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Who am I? Such trivial matters can't possibly hold me."

Gou Hanshi chuckled but said nothing. On the side, Bai Cai felt like he had heard these words somewhere before... Although it had not been many times, they had left a deep impression.

"Martial Granduncle's favorite expression," Gou Hanshi prompted.

Bai Cai was suddenly enlightened. He recalled the sight several years ago when his martial granduncle gathered all the disciples of Mount Li for a meeting, and repeatedly shook his head.

Tang Thirty-Six warned, "Don't misunderstand, I didn't learn from him. We just happen to have the same interests."

Bai Cai jeered, "Esteemed Martial Granduncle has the strength to back up his words, while you would probably still be imprisoned if not for His Holiness the Pope's protection. Just how are you the same?"

Tang Thirty-Six raised his brows and shot back, "That I have this sort of friend is due to my skill. To be impolite, just who has a better eye for talent than me?"

He was naturally speaking of how he had managed to get acquainted with Chen Changsheng in the Heavenly Dao Academy and later on in the Plum Garden Inn.

As for the people who realized Chen Changsheng's extraordinary properties afterwards, it was probably Luoluo, followed by Gou Hanshi.

At the time, the Mount Li Sword Sect's disciples were rivals to the people of the Orthodox Academy, but Gou Hanshi had never once underestimated Chen Changsheng.

Gou Hanshi naturally wouldn't quarrel with him over whose eyes were better. Pointing to the platform, he said, "It's about to begin; don't you have to go back?"

"You intend to drive away your guest? We haven't met in three years; what's the harm in chatting a little bit more?"

Tang Thirty-Six simply had no intention of going back. He took a chair from Scholartree Manor's seating area and sat down by Gou Hanshi.

He used a very soft voice to whisper a few things to Gou Hanshi, so low that not even Bai Cai could hear.

Gou Hanshi's expression did not change. He calmly responded, "I understand. You can leave now."

Tang Thirty-Six knew that Gou Hanshi was a true gentleman. Since he had said that he understood, he would naturally do it. Tang Thirty-Six could be at ease, but he still was not willing to leave.

He said woefully to Gou Hanshi, "Just look at Chen Changsheng over there, sitting all by his lonesome. It's so uncomfortable; I certainly don't want that."

Bai Cai interrupted, "Why do I think that you're worried that you'll have to stand there, since there's no chairs behind His Holiness?"

Tang Thirty-Six appeared unmoved as he replied, "Since you understand, why do you have to be so ignorant and insist on exposing it? You must have learned this from your second brother."

.....

.....

Tang Thirty-Six naturally didn't want to stand, but that woeful sigh of his was not completely false.

With the Pope's arrival, the archbishop from the southern church could no longer remain seated. He had long since stood up and gone over to accompany Hu Thirty-Two in attending on the Pope. Coupled with the ten-some priests who followed, Chen Changsheng's figure on the platform did not seem very lonely, but... it was somewhat lonely.

The clouds obscured the sun. The plateau, which was ten-some li in radius, was caressed by a gentle breeze stirred by an array, assuring that everyone was comfortable.

Three Daoist nuns arrived, a hundred-some disciples of South Stream Temple following behind them.

The gentle breeze caused their Daoist robes to rustle.

Everyone bowed, while the Prince of Xiang and the two clan heads also stood. Only Chen Changsheng did not move.

He was not even allowed to bow to these martial grandaunts of South Stream Temple, as this was not in accordance with the laws and etiquette of the church.

To be different from the masses was perhaps the reason for loneliness?

Huai Ren first thanked the Pope for coming, then mentioned the Prince of Xiang and the two clan heads, after which she spoke of all the other sects. Finally, she began to discuss the topic of today's ceremony.

Her first sentence explicitly stated the purpose. "South Stream Temple has decided to close the temple for ten years. I invite all our fellow Daoists to act as witnesses..."

Gou Hanshi had already guessed at South Stream Temple's intentions before coming, but since Chen Changsheng had arrived, the situation should have improved. Unexpectedly, this extremely senior martial grandaunt still persisted in closing the temple. Then he noticed that Chen Changsheng's position was quite some distance from South Stream Temple's, causing him to be even more concerned.

"Since you arrived last night, does that mean you failed to persuade them?" he asked Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six sneered at Huai Ren, "These old things seem to pity the state of the world and don't want South Stream Temple to be pulled into its foul waters, but really, they've just been lonely too long and aren't willing to resign themselves. They just want to come up and stir up a storm to prove that they are the true masters

of South Stream Temple. How could they be persuaded?"

Of the various generations of the Mount Li Sword Sect, the thousand-some teachers and disciples of all its various mountains, all the disciples—excluding the most senior Su Li, whose innate character was most unruly and arrogant—were strict and righteous people, regardless of whether they were born in poverty or grew up in some respected family. This sort of personality meant that they all paid great attention to seniority, respecting the gap between the old and the young.

Upon hearing Tang Thirty-Six's words, Bai Cai felt very uncomfortable and creased his brow.

'Luo Bu' sounds rather similar to the Chinese word for 'radish', and as mentioned before, 'Bai Cai' literally means 'cabbage'.

Chapter 886 – Does Anyone Object?

Gou Hanshi smiled and said, "Back then, when your senior brothers first entered the capital, they thought the same. Your fourth brother got annoyed with him at first glance and wanted nothing more than to take out his sword and hack him to death. Later on, he understood that though his vulgar mouth was annoying, that didn't mean he was a bad person, or why would your fourth brother have gone to Wenshui several days ago to save him?"

"I certainly won't accept his feelings. Next time, if he wants to hack me, we can continue," Tang Thirty-Six carelessly said.

Gou Hanshi suddenly remembered something and asked, "And what of that fellow?"

Tang Thirty-Six knew that he was talking about Zhexiu and replied, "He went to Mount Li."

Gou Hanshi was given a shock, but realized after a moment that Tang Thirty-Six was just scaring him. At such a grand event like the closing off of South Stream Temple, Zhexiu was assuredly around Chen Changsheng, presumably hiding in the shadows to defend against some sudden change. He couldn't possibly have suddenly run off to Mount Li.

"So many years have passed; just when are you going to mature a little?" he helplessly asked Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six teased, "You think it's very childish? Then why were you scared just now? Perhaps you also know that your side is in the wrong on this matter."

Gou Hanshi recalled how his junior sister had gradually turned taciturn over these last few years and sighed. No one dared to break the strict order that their martial granduncle had made before leaving, so how should they deal with this matter?

.....

.....

Huai Ren spoke very calmly, using her gentle voice and warm tone to describe the history of 'closing the temple'. Although she did not give the reason for today's closing of the temple, everyone knew that it was to avoid the war between the Orthodoxy and the Imperial Court. At the same time, she vaguely implied that she and her two martial sisters would not involve themselves in the affairs of the temple. Once the temple was formally closed, they would formally enter secluded cultivation and no longer issue any opinions on temple matters. Moreover, if the Holy Maiden exited her seclusion ahead of time, she could announce at any time she wished that the temple was open again.

Her faint white temple uniform and the somewhat dull light from the sky complemented each other well. This, coupled with her gentle expression and merciful Qi made her very persuasive.

At the start, there were some cultivators who were shocked and confused at this matter of closing the temple and wanted to object, with the fiercest opposition coming from the subordinate sects who were closely related to South Stream Temple. However, they gradually began to feel that this was the best choice for them and South Stream Temple.

Afterward, Daoist Nun Huai Ren began to make plans for what would happen after the temple was closed.

Holy Maiden Peak was a holy land, the ancestral court of the Daoist faith in the south, not something so simple as one mountain and one temple. Nor could the matter be considered done if the several hundred disciples ceased to communicate with the secular world. South Stream Temple managed countless subordinate sects and possessed innumerable businesses and farmland. Plans needed to be arranged for these things so as to avoid a great turmoil.

She first spoke to the Imperial Court's diplomatic mission. The

general idea was that the Imperial Court should prioritize the common people and by no means squander all the careful thought South Stream Temple engaged in before deciding to close the temple. The Prince of Xiang rose and represented the emperor and the Imperial Court in making a solemn promise, saying that they would absolutely do such and such.

She then turned to her fellow Daoists of the south and declared that all of Holy Maiden Peak's subordinate sects, businesses, farmland, and parks would be administered by the Mount Li Sword Sect. Gou Hanshi was flabbergasted by this, but he still rose and nodded. He did not do anything more, as he knew that this matter would not end so simply.

"For these arrangements, does anyone have any other proposal?"

Huai Ren asked this question to the elder from the Longevity Sect. The Longevity Sect had been waning for many years, and this second-generation elder was one level of seniority below an elder like Huai Ren. However, the Longevity Sect and Holy Maiden Peak were still the ancestral courts for the southern faction of the Daoist faith, so they still needed to be asked for comment, even if it was only superficial.

Of course, nothing unexpected happened. The second-generation elder of the Longevity Sect immediately gave his approval, and even remembered to say a few words of praise.

Gou Hanshi said nothing. Given the exalted status of Holy Maiden Peak and the Longevity Sect in the southern cultivation world, even the Mount Li Sword Sect found it inconvenient to speak.

Finally, Huai Ren looked at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng was the Pope and nominally represented all of the Orthodoxy, the Daoist faith. The closing of South Stream Temple required him to nominally show his approval.

In the end, though, it was just nominal.

Countless people also looked to Chen Changsheng.

He was the Pope and seated at the highest place.

He appeared high above the crowd, and in reality, was rather lonely. He appeared to wield a great authority, yet he found it very difficult to stop these proceedings.

That is, unless the Orthodoxy wanted to first fight with South Stream Temple before beginning its fight with the Imperial Court.

"I wonder what Chen Chang... no, His Holiness the Pope will say," Bai Cai nervously said as he watched.

Gou Hanshi said, "In normal circumstances he wouldn't speak. He's never said much in front of others, and whenever Tang Tang is there, it's usually Tang Tang that talks."

Just as expected, Tang Thirty-Six stood and walked out of the Mount Li Sword Sect's seating area to face the crowd.

Countless gazes moved from Chen Changsheng to him, but he seemed unaware. He asked Huai Ren, "Your surname?"

Huai Ren calmly replied, "My Daoist name is Huai Ren."

If Tang Thirty-Six wanted to find a weakness by making her mad, she would not give this junior of the Tang clan a single chance.

She had cultivated in South Stream Temple for a hundred-some years and traveled the world for even longer. Although she had still not managed to break through that threshold, her Dao heart had long since become brightly lit.

She had not expected that Tang Thirty-Six had no plans to anger her, only wanted to use this time to speak his mind.

"So you're not surnamed Xu. Then you definitely aren't Xu Yourong's aunt by blood."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at her and said, "Of course, even if you

were the Holy Maiden's aunt by blood, everything you said just now was useless. It was all nonsense."

With these words, the plateau clamored with discussion.

The sentimental, reasonable, and even touching words of Huai Ren were all nonsense in his view?

The three Daoist nuns were extremely senior martial grandaunts of South Stream Temple. Even the Prince of Xiang and the two clan heads had paid them the deepest respect.

No one had expected for Tang Thirty-Six to speak to them so rudely.

"No matter how senior you are, just what right do any of you have to decide South Stream Temple's future?"

Tang Thirty-Six sneered at her, "This place is Holy Maiden Peak, not Huai Ren Peak. You can hold this absurd meeting again once you become Holy Maiden."

These were harsh words, difficult to fend off. Huai Ren calmly gazed at him, saying nothing.

Tang Thirty-Six then looked at the Longevity Sect elder and said, "You agree to the closing of the temple? Does the current Longevity Sect have the right to say such words, or is it that you think your own words have the power?"

The elder thought for a moment, then replied, "That's right, my words truly don't have the power. Consider my words from before as if I hadn't said them."

This reply caused Huai Ren's gaze to turn grave and for Huai Shu's and Huai Bi's expressions to shift.

The Longevity Sect had lost much of its strength, but since it, like Holy Maiden Peak, was one of the ancestral halls of the southern faction, it still had some foundational resources.

Even though Tang Thirty-Six was the eldest grandson of the

Tang clan, how could this elder be cowed by just a few words from him?

Chapter 887 – If You Ask Me, My Answer Is No

Only the Longevity Sect elder understood the meaning of Tang Thirty-Six's words.

The poison that had been used on the Tang First Master had come from Chusu, and Chusu was a monster raised by the Longevity Sect.

If this elder said to Tang Thirty-Six that his words had power, then the fury of the Tang clan would be his to bear.

He did not dare, so he could only say that his words held no power.

Tang Thirty-Six turned his gaze to the Prince of Xiang and those other powerful figures. "Words without the slightest potency, no matter how moving, are still just nonsense. Even in its dire straits, the Longevity Sect is not so idiotic as to approve a pile of nonsensical words. I think that this reasoning also holds true for everyone else present."

The Wu clan head looked at Tang Thirty-Six and said, "Worthy nephew, your words are somewhat too excessive. This is, after all, South Stream Temple's affair."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Sir is my elder and speaks reason. Since this has nothing to do with any of our clans, why make our positions known in advance? If the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy want to fight, let them fight. It won't be too late to pick a side when the winner is about to be decided, so why take our seats in advance?"

The Old Lady of the Mutuo clan sighed, "The Old Master did not say as such in his letter."

Tang Thirty-Six smiled. "Madam also knows that a few things happened in Wenshui City recently. My esteemed elder has

naturally had a change of mind."

Huai Ren finally spoke.

She calmly said to Tang Thirty-Six, "In the end, this is still a matter of my South Stream Temple. Although the stance of others is also very important, it is not critical."

Tang Thirty-Six faintly smiled at her and asked, "This being the case, why has Senior called so many people to add to your prestige?"

Infuriated, Huai Bi shouted, "As an outsider, what right do you have to criticize the matters of my South Stream Temple!"

Huai Ren indicated that she should say no more, then said to Tang Thirty-Six, "I know that you've always felt that since the Holy Maiden passed the management of the temple to two disciples before entering seclusion, we elders who have returned after traveling the world should not involve ourselves in such affairs, especially something as major as the closing of the temple. Do I speak correctly?"

She spoke these words to Tang Thirty-Six, and naturally to Chen Changsheng, the Mount Li Sword Sect, and Scholartree Manor as well.

Tang Thirty-Six felt that something was wrong. He frowned, but didn't give a 'yes' or 'no'.

"Ping Xuan, Yi Chen, before the Holy Maiden entered seclusion, she decreed that the temple was yours to manage."

Huai Ren warmly said, "In front of our fellow Daoists of the world, I will ask you: do you agree or disagree to the closing of the temple?"

As she said this, many gazes fell on two South Stream Temple disciples at the front of the crowd. The cultivators of the Mount Li Sword Sect, Scholartree Manor, and all those other sects present knew that these two were Ping Xuan and Yi Chen, the people that

the Holy Maiden had personally chosen to handle the matters of the temple.

Hearing this, Ye Xiaolian and the other young girls of South Stream Temple glanced at each other, pleasantly surprised. Their senior sisters—or perhaps it was better to say 'their martial aunts'—would naturally not agree.

Tang Thirty-Six suddenly felt uneasy.

Ping Xuan's face was pale, and for a very long time, she did not speak.

She recalled the long conversation she had with her master Huai Ren last night, thought of how her master had talked about a tradition that would persist through the ages, how the existence of the temple's Dao was at stake, remembered the resolve and boldness her master had shown as she declared that she was willing to die for a just cause. She had no idea what she would do. Based on her own desires and her understanding of the Holy Maiden, she would naturally object, but would this not be condemning her master to death in front of the world?

Yi Chen was facing an identical situation. She recalled the serene and firm expression of her master last night and her Dao heart gradually wavered. She could not maintain her calm expression, and tears began to trickle from her eyes. As she silently apologized to the Holy Maiden, she stammered out, "I agree."

Ping Xuan glanced at her, lips trembling. She wanted to say something, but ultimately remained silent.

The plateau became abnormally silent. There was no sound but that of the breeze ruffling the white temple uniforms.

The crowd was deeply shocked. Not even the Prince of Xiang and the two clan heads had expected that these two second-generation senior sisters in charge of the temple's affairs would agree to the closing of the temple.

Huai Ren gazed at them, a relieved expression on her face as she kindly said, "You are both good disciples who support your teacher."

All was still. Everything had been decided.

No one expected that an unremarkable girl of South Stream Temple would stand up.

Whether it was in the south or in the capital, very few people in the world of cultivation recognized her.

Ye Xiaolian had stood up.

She then prostrated on the ground, using her gathered courage to say, "My three martial grandaunts, I do not agree to the closing of the temple."

Huai Bi snorted and yelled, "Impudent! A trifling third-generation disciple dares to rashly involve herself in matters of the temple? Withdraw!"

At this moment, several dozen disciples stood up and prostrated behind Ye Xiaolian.

These disciples had essentially all followed Xu Yourong to Mount Han, and then to the capital, where they had stayed in the Orthodox Academy for a very long time.

"I ask for Martial Grandteacher to think this matter over again!"

"I ask for Martial Grandaunt to withdraw the order!"

Huai Bi was surprised to see so many junior disciples stand up and oppose the decision, and the finger she pointed at them began to tremble.

Huai Shu saw that there were two juniors amongst disciples that she was very optimistic about, and couldn't help but feel deeply disappointed. Her heart ached.

This sight made Huai Ren recall her conversation with Chen Changsheng last night, and she became somewhat absent-minded.

But she soon thought of the rivers of blood that would flow once war broke out and she quickly gained back her resolve. She said to the disciples, "South Stream Temple is not only the disciples, but the inheritance passed down by successive generations of teachers and disciples. If you do not wish to remain in the temple, you may leave. Presumably, the Orthodox Academy or the Li Palace will accept you."

The meaning of these words was crystal-clear. If these disciples persisted in opposing the closing of the temple, they would be driven from Holy Maiden Peak and lose their status as disciples of South Stream Temple!

Ye Xiaolian and her fellow disciples had miserable expressions, and they said no more. They were not willing to be cut off from the world, but who could bear the anguish of being driven from their sect?

At this moment, the opinions of South Stream Temple were finally united under the unyielding methods of the three martial grandaunts. No one else voiced their opposition.

The Prince of Xiang stood up and smiled. "My congratulations to my fellow Daoists for taking their leave from the quarrels of the secular world. Being able to focus on cultivation is truly worthy of envy."

With these words, countless cultivators stood and congratulated South Stream Temple.

Only the Mount Li Sword Sect and Scholartree Manor remained silent. Bai Cai was so angry that he wanted to say something, but he was stopped by Gou Hanshi.

Tang Thirty-Six had returned to his seat. He squinted at the ever-serene Huai Ren, apparently thinking of something.

"Seclusion is a vicious path, the last resort of Saints. If this is so worthy of envy, why did Your Highness leave seclusion this year?"

A voice resounded through the plateau.

The voices on the plateau had gradually quieted, making this voice even clearer.

It was very calm and indifferent voice, but also one of incomparable resolve.

"If you ask me whether the temple can be closed or not, my answer is naturally 'no'."

Angered at these words, Huai Bi turned and shouted, "Who said 'no'?"

"Me."

Chen Changsheng rose and gazed at her. "Because none of you ever asked me, I can only speak up."

The plateau was in an uproar, countless gazes looking over.

Chapter 888 – This Is a Divine Edict

Translated by: Hypersheep325

The Prince of Xiang gazed at the distant platform, a cold glint flashing in his eyes.

The Wu clan head and the Mutuo clan's Old Lady were still calm, as if they had heard nothing.

Gou Hanshi slightly shook his head to Bai Cai, urging him to keep calm.

The Vice Principal of Scholartree Manor arched his brows, an expression of surprise appearing on his face.

People like them had long expected the Li Palace to object to the closing of South Stream Temple, and Chen Changsheng to stand and speak.

Those two martial grandaunts of South Stream Temple had just been too agitated and did not have a deep understanding of Chen Changsheng, so they had not thought about this.

But since South Stream Temple's will was united, what could he do?

Chen Changsheng's method was extremely simple.

No one asked him, so he asked himself and answered.

His answer was one word.

"No."

This sight made Tang Thirty-Six recall the mahjong game he had played in the old estate, and he could help but feel somewhat emotional.

At the time, the Tang Old Master had said he could kill Tang Thirty-Six, and Chen Changsheng had similarly said one word.

"No."

Then and now, Chen Changsheng's voice was very soft, but it was louder than the simultaneous shouts of a crowd of thousands, like thunder crashing down from the high heavens.

Because he was the Pope, his every word a divine edict that would be carried out by millions of the faithful.

"They will not go to the Orthodox Academy or the Li Palace."

Chen Changsheng pointed at the kneeling disciples and said, "Because South Stream Temple will not close, and this is the place where they will live and cultivate."

At these unflinching words, Huai Bi furiously spat back, "This a matter of my South Stream Temple. I request that Your Holiness the Pope not presumptuously involve yourself in them."

No matter the time, Huai Ren's expression remained forever serene and warm, even when it seemed the matter of closing the temple had been decided. She had also expected Chen Changsheng to stand up, but she had not expected for Chen Changsheng's stance to be so direct, even crude.

"Your Holiness the Pope, my words to you last night were out of respect, but it did not mean that the affairs of South Stream Temple require Your Holiness's assent."

Huai Ren's expression turned solemn as she spoke, her voice still gentle, but her stance unwavering.

Holy Maiden Peak had originated from a schism in the Orthodoxy.

From the moment the first Holy Maiden established South Stream Temple, the Li Palace lost all authority over the Daoist faith in the south, much less the affairs of South Stream Temple.

Even the Pope had no right to involve themselves in the matters of Holy Maiden Peak.

This was history, a history that everyone had to respect.

Many of the southern cultivators repeatedly nodded in agreement with Huai Ren's words, and even Gou Hanshi found it a rather thorny problem that he wondered how Chen Changsheng would resolve.

At this moment, another person stood up, one that no one expected.

The Vice Principal of Scholartree Manor smiled and said, "Senior's words are incorrect. Senior has been traveling for the past years, caring little for the affairs of the world, and presumably does not know of the relationship between His Holiness the Pope and the Holy Maiden, but who in the continent does not know of it? This Holy Maiden Peak can be said to be half his, so how can His Holiness avoid the affairs of the temple?"

These words caused the Prince of Xiang to frown, the Old Lady of the Mutuo clan to smile, and the Wu clan head to repeatedly nod. The other cultivators, on the other hand, had very strange expressions.

Putting aside that engagement that shook the continent, the battle on the Bridge of Helplessness was enough to start a rumor that Chen Changsheng's love for Xu Yourong had been rekindled and that he was attempting to reestablish the engagement. The common people might have still thought that this was a one-sided love on Chen Changsheng's part, but then at the Boiling Stone Summit in Mount Han, many people were witness to Xu Yourong's saving Chen Changsheng from Guan Bai's sword, and the ensuing journey from Mount Han to the capital had been spread far and wide by now. If not for the coup of the Mausoleum of Books that happened right afterward, the entire continent would have probably been discussing the romance of Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong for a whole two years. At present, who didn't know that Pope Chen Changsheng and Holy Maiden Xu Yourong shared a mutual affection and were essentially a match made in heaven?

This somewhat frivolous comment from the Vice Principal of

Scholartree Manor made Huai Bi so angry that her face went red. Her eyebrows shot straight up as she yelled, "Impudent! Anyone who dares to sully the Holy Maiden's good reputation will have to ask my sword!"

The chatter on the plateau gradually grew softer.

Huai Bi gripped her Dao sword and harshly said to Chen Changsheng, "Your Holiness the Pope, do you truly want to force this old self to drench this place in blood?"

Chen Changsheng asked back, "Are you threatening me?"

Even the Prince of Xiang, an expert of the Divine Domain and one of the most powerful people in the court, would have to come up to him to pay respects, not daring to show the slightest disrespect in front of so many people, let alone threaten him. Although she was an extremely senior martial grandaunt of South Stream Temple, could she possibly be so bold?

Huai Bi was indignant, but she could not strike. Her sword buzzed with a deep resentment as sword intent gushed out from her sheath and hewed thousands of marks onto the stones surrounding her.

In her sorrow and rage, she had almost suffered internal injuries. Huai Shu quickly hurried over to support, transmitting to Huai Bi a pure strand of true essence to protect her Dao heart.

Huai Ren looked into Chen Changsheng's eyes and said, "The demons have retreated for now and South Stream Temple desires to close the temple. We only want to remain uninvolved and not be used by some ambitious people. Once the Holy Maiden leaves her seclusion, she can open the temple at any time. Is there anything inappropriate about this old body's actions?"

"I did not have the time to respond to Your Reverence's words from last night. My answer is 'no'."

Chen Changsheng looked at her and said, "Even if you've agreed

to close the temple, my answer is still 'no'. Matters of the temple and closing the temple are two different things. Yourong passed the matters of the temple to you all to temporarily handle, but that does not mean that any of you have the right to decide on something as significant as closing the temple. None of the disciples of South Stream Temple have this right."

He then looked at Huai Ren and Ping Xuan, and said, "This naturally includes you."

Huai Bi sneered, "Then who has the right? Could it be Your Holiness the Pope?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "No, I also don't have this right. The only person with the right to decide if the temple closes is Yourong."

The Prince of Xiang, who had said nothing this entire time, suddenly said, "Your Holiness speaks reason. For such a major event, we truly should invite the Holy Maiden out of seclusion to make the final decision."

Chen Changsheng suddenly felt a hint of wariness.

Yesterday in front of the stone wall at the summit of Holy Maiden Peak, he had vaguely sensed a problem, and it now seemed that this problem was gradually taking shape.

Could it be that the Imperial Court and his master wanted to use this matter to force Xu Yourong out of her seclusion?

Everyone knew that forcefully ending one's seclusion could cause one terrible harm, and this was coupled with the fact that she was attempting something that had never been done before.

"There's no need. I will handle this matter."

Chen Changsheng did not give the Prince of Xiang a chance to stir any further trouble on this topic. He looked to Huai Ren and said, "I well understand just how important Holy Maiden Peak is to her. She is currently in seclusion and cannot continue to care for Holy

Maiden Peak and the disciples that live here in the way she promised her teacher, so this matter naturally comes to me to handle."

Xu Yourong's secluded cultivation was in large part for his sake, so he naturally should bear her responsibilities, like protecting this peak.

Huai Ren harshly asked, "Could it be that the laws of my Holy Maiden Peak must also be decided by Your Holiness?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "The Holy Maiden comprehends the monoliths; the Pope comprehends the laws. Such has been the case for countless years, or does Your Reverence believe that Holy Maiden Peak is not part of the Orthodoxy?"

Earlier, Huai Ren had attempted to use history and rules to make him yield, and now that he was using history and rules, she had no other choice but to accept his reasoning.

Although Holy Maiden Peak belonged to the southern faction, to the millions of believers and disciples, it was still a part of the Orthodoxy.

Let alone these three martial grandaunts, even if all the Holy Maidens throughout history were revived, they would not dare deny this point.

Huai Ren fell silent, no longer speaking.

Seeing her senior sister in such a state, Huai Bi grew even more anxious and yelled, "At the very least, we are not subordinate to the Li Palace, so why should we accept your rule?"

The thought of the venerable Daoist's promise made her too anxious. She had even forgotten to properly address Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng looked at her and said, "I am the Pope, and I comprehend the laws of the church. Could it be that Holy Maiden Peak is not a part of the Orthodoxy?"

It was the same question, but with its repetition, it seemed even more unyielding.

The pressure of the situation destabilized Huai Bi's Dao heart. In her extreme irritation, she shouted, "Even if it's not, so what?"

Chen Changsheng stared into her eyes and said, "If Holy Maiden Peak is not a part of the Orthodoxy, what right does it have to comprehend the Heavenly Tome Monoliths? Tomorrow, I will announce this matter to the world, and then send the Orthodoxy cavalry to surround Holy Maiden Peak and remove the rubbings of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, severing South Stream Temple's lineage and letting you know what it truly means to close the temple."

Huai Ren recalled the conversation from last night, and her expression suddenly changed.

She had said to Chen Changsheng that there were three kinds of 'closing the temple' in South Stream Temple.

The one Chen Changsheng spoke of was naturally the last one.

South Stream Temple would have its lineage severed, unite with the Li Palace, and return to the tradition of the Orthodoxy!

Chapter 889 – A Storm Descends upon the Mountain

The mountains were silent.

The South Stream Temple disciples looked at each other, not knowing what to say, especially the young girls like Ye Xiaolian.

Those disciples that had never interacted with Chen Changsheng before were, on the contrary, rather calm.

In their view, the Pope was the most revered person in the world, imbued with majesty and boldness. Even against these martial grandaunts, what did it matter if he said a few harsh words?

But Ye Xiaolian and her fellows knew that Chen Changsheng had a calm and gentle personality, so why was he so unflinching today?

Was it truly that the position changes the person? Or was it the power of time?

.....

.....

It had nothing to do with position or time.

Tang Thirty-Six and Hu Thirty-Two were well aware that Chen Changsheng had not been like this last night. In their shock, they wondered, just what happened on the summit?

The ill omen he had sensed in front of the stone wall at the summit of Holy Maiden Peak and that casual comment from the Prince of Xiang were the reasons for Chen Changsheng's change in stance.

Moreover, the conduct of these three martial grandaunts had already surpassed the level that he could accept, whether it was in their treatment of the temple's disciples or the possibility of alarming Xu Yourong into leaving her seclusion through their

attempt to close the temple. The latter might even be deliberate!

"The matter of closing the temple ends here for the moment. Everything will wait until the Holy Maiden comes out."

He said to Huai Ren, "Whether out of malice or kindness, my answer on the matter is still 'no'."

It didn't matter how high one's seniority, how great one's prestige, or that the people managing the temple were one's disciples, or that one was moved by emotion, acted with reason, and was forced onto this path.

It didn't matter if the Imperial Court wholeheartedly supported it, if the venerable Daoist had made the plan himself, or that countless people wanted to see the temple close, that through unity came strength.

If he said 'no', then such a thing would not happen. It was 'no', even if everyone else said 'yes'.

Because he was the Pope.

.....

.....

"Wait for the Holy Maiden to come out?"

"Just when will she come out?"

"Ten years? Twenty years? Fifty years?"

"What if she never comes out?"

"What if she's dead?"

A sharp voice suddenly came from the mountains.

At first, everyone thought that the owner of this voice was asking a question, but then they realized that something was wrong.

This voice was suffused with hatred, brimming with malice. These were not sincere questions, only curses that pierced straight into one's bones.

This person was cursing Xu Yourong to never emerge, even to die a sudden death!

Hearing this, even Huai Ren and her martial sisters showed surprise, much less those disciples beneath.

Clangclangclang. These sounds resounded in the air as sword after sword was unsheathed. Sword intent filled the air above the plateau, warily and angrily aimed at the mountain path.

Countless gazes followed these sword intents to the mountain path.

Two figures gradually appeared at the intersection between the plateau and the mountain path.

One was a scholar, the other a Daoist nun.

The appearance of this pair caused many people to suddenly rise, their faces stricken with shock. The Prince of Xiang slightly frowned, glanced at the Divine General at his side, then slowly rose as well.

There were very few people on this continent who could cause the Prince of Xiang to rise and welcome them, and this scholar and Daoist nun were two of them.

Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi of the Storms of the Eight Directions.

Their identities were quickly spread to the thousand-some cultivators on the plateau.

The crowd stood up and bowed like a tide, and then they felt bewildered.

Why would these two experts of the continent suddenly appear here?

Many sects knew that Wuqiong Bi had a grudge against Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy, but was it to the extent that she had to curse Xu Yourong with such hate-filled words? And

even if she was as vicious and coarse as she was rumored to be, what sort of person was Bie Yanghong that he could let his wife get so out of control?

Could something have happened recently that caused a new grudge to be added onto the old?

Under countless eyes, Wuqiong Bi walked to the center of the plateau.

She used her cold and venomous gaze to look around, and, as expected, ultimately stare at Chen Changsheng.

"Where's the Demon Princess? Hidden away in the Garden of Zhou?"

Many people in the cultivation world knew that the Garden of Zhou was in Chen Changsheng's hands, though most people believed that he only had the key to the Garden of Zhou.

Demon Princess Nanke's being at Chen Changsheng's side was also already an open secret.

But not even the most unbridled and avaricious person would dare to seize the Garden of Zhou from Chen Changsheng.

The most inflexible and hot-headed person would not dare to expose that secret in front of the masses and thus question Chen Changsheng's virtue.

Because Chen Changsheng was the Pope.

And though it was not his original intention, his prestige had risen ever higher after the story behind the Cinnabar Pill became known.

On the northern frontier, there were now many believers that regarded him as the incarnation of benevolence and sacrifice, endlessly worshipping him.

Even in the south, his relationship with Su Li and Wang Po meant that the people felt that he was even more worthy of trust

than the previous Pope.

Today, Wuqiong Bi had suddenly exposed this secret. What did she want to do?

The plateau was abnormally still.

Wuqiong Bi stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes and said, "That Demon Princess has killed many human experts. What does Your Holiness intend by taking her in?"

Chen Changsheng had known for a long time that he would face this question and had mentally prepared himself. He said, "In the battle in the mountains, Nanke suffered injuries to her sea of consciousness to help me escape and is currently of unsound mind. At the time, I promised that I would cure her. Once she is cured, I will naturally drive her away, to be enemies when we next meet."

"Once she is cured? And if her illness is never cured? If she remains an imbecile until her death?"

Wuqiong Bi's words were still so malicious, sounding like curses.

No matter how gentle Chen Changsheng's personality, he could not help but raise his brows and think, just what has happened that has made her seem almost insane?

"You are not willing to hand over Nanke, but you should at least be able to hand over that damnable Black Dragon, no?"

Wuqiong Bi stared into his eyes, a faint smile on her lips. Yet her expression was so sorrowful that rather than smiling, she seemed to be crying, creating an ugly face.

Her smile gradually faded and she expressionlessly declared, "I want to peel off her skin, pull out her muscles, cut off her flesh bit by bit. Perhaps I'll eat it raw, or maybe I'll make soup, but I'll eat it all, not leaving a single piece, a single drop. Even the plates and bowls will be chewed up and swallowed."

Her voice was as cold as the frigid air rising from the abyss

behind Xuelao City.

Her words were spiteful to the extreme, and also cruel. They echoed over the plateau, blowing about like evil winds that made everyone tremble in fear.

By now, even the slowest person could see that Wuqiong Bi's hatred for Chen Changsheng billowed to the heavens.

Chen Changsheng fell quiet for a while, then turned to Bie Yanghong and asked, "Sir Bie, just what has happened?"

The coup of the Mausoleum of Books had resulted in the deaths of many of the continent's experts, and the Storms of the Eight Directions had withered away. Even if the Prince of Xiang, the Mount Li Sword Sect Master and Wang Po were added in, they still would not be able to reach the original number. Amongst these people, Bie Yanghong had always held a good reputation and was deeply admired. He and his wife Wuqiong Bi created a stark contrast.

The Tianhai Divine Empress had greatly admired Bie Yanghong, and Chen Changsheng was also willing to trust him.

Bie Yanghong remained silent, not replying to his question.

"What has happened?"

Wuqiong Bi harshly howled, "Your Holiness, you had that evil dragon of yours kill my son, and you have the face to ask what has happened!"

These words caused the plateau to suddenly explode with cries of shock.

Chapter 890 – Condemnation

Bie Tianxin was dead? Although his cultivation level was not enough to be ranked amongst true geniuses like the ones on the Proclamation of Liberation and Proclamation of Golden Distinction, he was still a famous person on the continent.

After all, not everyone could be like him, with both parents being experts of the Divine Domain. In truth, other than Luoluo, one could not find another.

A person like this had died? Who would dare to kill him?

As they thought this question, the thousand-some people on the plateau turned once more to Chen Changsheng.

Everyone knew that Chen Changsheng and the Orthodoxy, or to put it more accurately, the Orthodox Academy had a deep grudge with the mother and son that were Wuqiong Bi and Bie Tianxin.

And someone who could dare to kill Bie Tianxin and had the ability to... there were far too few people on the continent that could pull this off. Besides the Pope, who else could it be?

Chen Changsheng saw the hint of grief in Bie Yanghong's eyes and knew that Wuqiong Bi spoke the truth: Bie Tianxin was dead.

His mood sank as he realized that today's matter was even more troublesome than he had calculated yesterday with the Intellectual Sword.

Several years ago in the capital, the Li Palace had proposed the All-School Martial Exhibition, and he and the Orthodox Academy had once come into conflict with Bie Tianxin and his servant. But at that time, Bie Yanghong had sent a timely letter to Su Moyu to have him transfer from the Li Palace Academy to the Orthodox Academy, quickly pacifying the situation.

Afterward, Wuqiong Bi had snuck into the Orthodox Academy at night, attempting to kill Xuanyuan Po to establish her might, but

ended up being beaten like a stray dog by Su Li's letter.

In these two incidents, Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy had not felt like they had suffered losses, so he had never once thought about taking revenge on Wuqiong Bi and Bie Tianxin. With the passage of time and all the significant events that had ensued, he had even almost forgotten about these things. Some days ago, when he met Bie Tianxin in Hanqiu City, he hadn't even glanced at him.

"I ask that Sir please clearly explain what happened," Chen Changsheng said to Bie Yanghong.

Bie Yanghong gave him a deep glance, then said, "My son was unworthy, but I do not believe his crimes deserved death. I have come today to learn why he had to be killed."

Chen Changsheng replied, "The last time I met Bie Tianxin was in Hanqiu City, the first in three years."

Gou Hanshi rose and said, "I ask that Sir restrain your grief. This junior believes that there might be some misunderstandings in this matter and presumptuously requests for Senior to give some details."

Bie Yanghong placed his hands behind him and looked at the distant Tong River, his expression gradually chilling.

"My son died yesterday in the river canyon twenty li from Fengyang City. His body had been rendered into dust and thrown into the river. If not for the brand my wife and I had left on his body, as well as other secretive methods, it would have been impossible to find. Even if we had merely been slightly later, we would find it impossible to find him. This criminal was ruthless, malicious and meticulous, truly worthy of admiration."

This expert's admiration for the criminal who had killed his son was naturally sarcasm.

The more he admired, the more he wanted that person to die,

and to die a most miserable death, countless times more miserable than having one's bones ground to dust.

The plateau was very quiet, everyone solemnly listening to his words.

Upon hearing Fengyang City mentioned, Tang Thirty-Six and Hu Thirty-Two glanced at each other, unease springing forth in their minds.

Chen Changsheng replied, "I truly did go to Fengyang City, but I did not meet your son."

Bie Yanghong was not surprised that Chen Changsheng would admit to going to Fengyang. With tens of thousands of believers as witnesses, who would dare deny it?

He looked into Chen Changsheng's eyes and asked, "Did Nanke fly you across a certain part of the river?"

Chen Changsheng recalled that sight and said, "Correct."

Bie Yanghong fell silent for a few moments, then said, "The remnants of his body were beneath that part of the river."

Chen Changsheng fell silent.

As one of those involved, he naturally knew that this was a plot. The problem was that that this plot was so formidable that there was nothing he could say.

Wuqiong Bi rushed up to Bie Yanghong and yelled, "Just what do you want to do, speaking such nonsense to him!"

A chilly wind blew back and forth across the plateau, throwing her white hair into a somewhat sorry state.

Chen Changsheng had never liked her, but when he saw her grief-stricken appearance, he felt sympathy. "It truly was not me."

Wuqiong Bi turned around and stared at him, her eyes filled with spite, seemingly ready to bite him. "Then hand over that evil dragon!"

Chen Changsheng was somewhat confused as to why Wuqiong Bi was so set on Zhizhi and asked, "Did someone see her personally kill Bie Tianxin?"

"No. Even if there were an eyewitness, they could have been bribed, and I would not necessarily have believed them."

Bie Yanghong looked at him and said, "But there are some pieces of evidence that can't speak, yet are even more worthy of trust, because they can't be bribed, they can't be faked."

Saying this, he extended his right hand.

The renowned little red flower was still floating on his pinkie, drifting to and fro in the wind.

But the crowd was not paying attention to the flower, but the objects in his palm.

An extremely pure star radiance emerged from his palm, covering ten-some extremely small grains of ice.

These grains of ice were too small. If one was just a little too far away, they would find it impossible to see those grains clearly. However, when the grains of ice appeared, the entire plateau suddenly dropped in temperature.

A thin layer of frost appeared on the grass around Bie Yanghong.

Just what object was this that it was so cold?

Chen Changsheng did not recognize these items, but he was extremely familiar with this cold Qi.

In the next moment, his expression flickered.

Could this plot truly be that difficult to break?

"This is the Deep Freeze Dragon Breath that only Black Frost Dragons possess. It cannot be imitated."

Bie Yanghong looked at Chen Changsheng and asked, "How will Your Holiness explain this?"

With these words, the chattering crowd gradually fell silent once more.

Countless pairs of eyes looked at Chen Changsheng.

Gou Hanshi and the Vice Principal of Scholartree Manor turned grave.

The Prince of Xiang and that Divine General at his side exchanged a silent glance.

Huai Bi gave a grim laugh.

Many important personages knew that there was only one Black Frost Dragon on the continent at present.

Those cultivators who did not know quickly found out through the chattering just now.

That Black Frost Dragon was the main character of the capital's legend of New North Bridge, and also the current Pope Chen Changsheng's Protector!

.....

.....

"Who says that the Deep Freeze Dragon Breath has to be the Black Frost Dragon's?

"Even if it is a Black Frost Dragon, who can determine that it's Chen Changsheng's Black Dragon?

"The Dragon race lives on the islands in the Southern Sea. The Golden Dragons left, but the Black Frost Dragons are still there. Who knows if a different Black Frost Dragon might have come to the continent?"

In such an oppressive atmosphere, someone who could ask such frivolous questions could only be Tang Thirty-Six.

He had already sensed that today's matter would be a problem that was incredibly difficult to deal with. Neither he nor Chen

Changsheng could think of a method to resolve the situation.

Thus, he could only attempt to bring up an endless string of annoying questions to muddy the situation and see if he could find a way out.

Many people would act rather passively to Tang Thirty-Six's methods, and then finally respond to them when the situation became rather awkward.

But Bie Yanghong responded very simply. He said very seriously to Tang Thirty-Six, "My son is dead. Please do not act this way."

Tang Thirty-Six fell quiet for a very long time, then retreated.

Chapter 891 – Who Will Stand in Front of Him?

"All the evidence now points to Zhusha."

Bie Yanghong looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "I request for Your Holiness the Pope to hand her over to me. I wish to question her."

'Zhusha' was the name Wang Zhice had given to the little Black Dragon many years ago.

It was also the name that Bie Yanghong and the other experts of the continent often used to address her.

"I did not kill Bie Tianxin, and it certainly was not Zhusha."

Chen Changsheng said to Bie Tianxin, "This is a plot. The last time I met Bie Tianxin was in Hanqiu City. If you do not believe my words, you can go and investigate just who Bie Tianxin has been with these last few days."

Bie Yanghong calmly gazed at him. It was impossible to tell whether he was actually listening to these words.

Gou Hanshi said, "Right, my peer was very talented and had a brand on his soul personally placed by two powerful seniors, so ordinary methods should not have been able to harm him. The only possibility is that he was ambushed by a Divine Domain expert who cut off Qi... and it is rumored that Zhusha has still not been able to break free from Wang Zhice's seal, so she should not have been able to do such a thing."

Wuqiong Bi's eyes had gone completely red and she was in no state of mind to hear reason. She shrilly yelled, "That evil dragon can't do it, but don't forget that His Holiness the Pope has the Divine Staff! Besides you, just who else would hate to the bones this old lady and my pitiful son! I am only asking you if you're willing to hand over that evil dragon or not!"

Chen Changsheng fell quiet, then responded, "Forgive me; it is difficult for me to follow this order."

Wuqiong Bi gave an enraged smile and shouted, "Then don't blame this old lady for treating you impolitely today!"

The southern church's archbishop's expression changed at these words. He took two steps forward to the edge of the platform and shouted back, "Impudent! Who dare to treat His Holiness the Pope with disrespect!"

Wuqiong Bi shrieked back, "For the sake of a private grudge, he even used an evil dragon to kill the innocent! Just how is a person of such morality qualified to be Pope!"

The entire crowd fell into an uproar at these words. Everyone understood what she intended to do.

Wuqiong Bi persisted in her demand that Chen Changsheng bring out the Black Dragon. If Chen Changsheng did not agree, she would use this matter to attack him.

In her view, the Black Dragon was the true culprit behind the murder of the son, and Chen Changsheng was the true ringleader! She could not possibly let him go!

Even if she had to make an enemy of the Orthodoxy, contend against the millions of faithful in the world, she would still kill Chen Changsheng and take vengeance for her son!

"I would quite like to see just who will protect you today!"

Wuqiong Bi stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes and venomously spat, "If you are not willing to hand over the Black Dragon, you will take her place in having your muscles pulled out, your skin peeled, your bones ground to dust!"

If two experts of the Divine Domain attacked at the same time, they would possess a terrifying momentum.

If the Prefects of the Li Palace with their treasures were standing

guard, Chen Changsheng would perhaps have nothing to fear, but this was Holy Maiden Peak. Experts on the level of the archbishop of the southern church and Hu Thirty-Two were far inferior to Wuqiong Bi and Bie Yanghong. Of course, if the Prince of Xiang and the other experts in the Imperial Court's diplomatic mission were willing to appear, the situation would change once more. The problem was that everyone could see the Imperial Court's shadow behind this matter, and even if it wasn't, why would the Imperial Court stick up for the Li Palace?

"Wang Po, get out here!"

Wuqiong Bi shouted at the gray sky, her cold voice shrieking, "Are you still protecting him today? Do you still have the face to protect him!"

The cultivators on the plateau were startled once more by these words. Had Wang Po also come today? Then where was he?

If Wuqiong Bi attacked Chen Changsheng to avenge her child, given Wang Po's normal behavior, just what would he do?

Quite some time passed, but the sky remained gloomy. Nobody appeared, nobody answered.

It seemed like Wang Po had not come to Holy Maiden Peak today. To many people on the plateau, this was excellent news.

If he was already at Holy Maiden Peak but chose not to appear, then this was even better news.

Because this meant that he thought that Chen Changsheng should hand over the evil dragon.

Countless gazes looked away from the gray sky and back to Chen Changsheng on the platform, displaying a diverse array of emotions.

There was delight, anxiety, apathy, and also a great deal of anger.

Wuqiong Bi began walking to Chen Changsheng, her eyes as cold

as ice. The horsetail whisk began to move on its own, throwing the air into a frightening turbulence.

Hu Thirty-Two, the archbishop from the southern church, and the ten-some priests were already at Chen Changsheng's side.

With just them, how could they oppose an expert of the Divine Domain?

Scholartree Manor's group was quiet while the disciples of Mount Li speechlessly looked at each other. Gou Hanshi was in a pensive mood while Tang Thirty-Six was looking thoughtfully at Bie Yanghong.

Was it really as Wuqiong Bi said? Was there no one that could protect Chen Changsheng?

This place was Holy Maiden Peak. If there was someone who had the ability to change the situation, it was naturally South Stream Temple.

The Orthodoxy had split into the north and south, but in regards to the sanctity of the Daoist faith and in external matters, they had always been in step with each other.

In the past, South Stream Temple would assuredly have kept Chen Changsheng safe, as he was the Pope. However, with the matter of closing the temple, the two sides had engaged in a fierce conflict. Chen Changsheng's stance was unprecedentedly hardline. Presumably, South Stream Temple, or at least those three martial grandaunts, would not have a different view on this duty.

Just as expected, just when Ping Xuan and Yi Chen were prepared to say something, they were interrupted by a cold snort.

"Since it's a suspect in a murder case, that evil dragon should come out and give a statement, even if it's my Orthodoxy's Protector."

Huai Bi looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "If Your Holiness continues to strenuously protect it, one cannot help but suspect..."

that the evil dragon really was instigated by you. If true, your morality is lacking, and so what right do you have to sit on the throne of the Pope? How can you still have the right to comprehend the laws of the church and concern yourself with the matters of my South Stream Temple?"

Her words were harsh, and also malicious. They immediately removed South Stream Temple from this matter and pushed Chen Changsheng into an incredibly passive position.

Hearing this, Ye Xiaolian could no longer keep silent. She regarded Chen Changsheng as one of her idols and in no way believed these criticisms. Grasping her sword, she charged to the front of the platform and angrily yelled to the crowd on the plateau, "His Holiness the Pope is not that sort of person!"

Fuming, Huai Bi snapped back, "Sinful disciples, what do you plan to do!"

Ye Xiaolian did not turn her head.

Wuqiong Bi slowly approached, an indescribable might and pressure accompanying her.

Ye Xiaolian was currently at the upper level of Ethereal Opening, an excellent achievement given the time she had cultivated, but how could she directly confront an expert of the Divine Domain?

Even though Wuqiong Bi was still around a hundred zhang away, even though Wuqiong Bi was not intentionally pressuring her opponent, Ye Xiaolian's face instantly paled, her hands beginning to tremble.

But she did not yield, and soon after, several more disciples of South Stream Temple rushed in front of Chen Changsheng.

At this sight, even Ping Xuan, whose head had remained bowed ever since she was asked about closing the temple, finally raised her head.

She was well aware of what the Holy Maiden would do.

She calmly declared, "Form the sword array!"

Countless cracks echoed through the mountains.

Countless sword glows illuminated the gloomy sky.

Several dozen girls rushed in front of Chen Changsheng and formed the world-famous sword array of South Stream Temple.

Just like it was in Mount Han, and just like it was in the Orthodox Academy.

Chapter 892 – The Sword Array of South Stream Temple!

Huai Ren looked at Ping Xuan and said in a solemn voice, "Have you really thought this over clearly?"

Ping Xuan calmly replied, "Master, the Holy Maiden handed South Stream Temple over to this disciple to temporarily manage, and this disciple has always been agonizing over how to do it. But now, I feel that I was overthinking it. A foolish person like me does not need to think of so much. All will be fine as long as I act according to the Holy Maiden's will. This way can never be wrong."

Huai Ren retorted, "Do you think that the Holy Maiden is a person who cannot tell right from wrong?"

Ping Xuan replied, "I only know that if the Holy Maiden were present, she would not allow any person to use any reason to threaten His Holiness the Pope."

From Mount Han to the capital, over a journey of thousands of li, she and many other disciples of South Stream Temple had personally witnessed this. It could not be wrong.

Huai Ren coldly said, "Even if he really did kill Bie Tianxin?"

Ping Xuan answered, "Master, I already said that no reason would be allowed."

Huai Ren found it hard to conceal her disappointment as she said, "Even if you clearly know that this will bring Holy Maiden Peak into endless tribulations from which there is no return?"

Ping Xuan replied, "If that is the Holy Maiden's will."

.....

.....

Wuqiong Bi was ten-some zhang from the platform.

She harshly rebuked the South Stream Temple disciples, "You want to use numbers to bully these pitiful elders who've lost their son?"

The white-haired burying the black-haired were truly worthy of sympathy, but she and Bie Yanghong were two of the few supreme experts of the world. Who could bully them?

The disciples were very nervous. This was the strongest opponent they had faced in their lives, but the sword array remained as firm as a mountain.

The thousand-some cultivators on the plateau nervously watched.

On one side was a true expert of the continent who had been immersed in the Divine Domain for many years.

On the other side was the legendary sword array which had achieved countless unimaginable feats on the field of battle.

When these two met, which would be stronger?

.....

.....

A howl echoed through the mountains.

The horsetail whisk in Wuqiong Bi's hand descended from the sky, smashing towards the platform.

The horsetail whisk swept through the air, each one of its countless hairs cutting through like bolts of lightning, leaving white trails of turbulence in their wakes.

An aura of extinction flickered in and out of these bolts of lightning and trails of turbulence in space, creating a terrifying sight.

At the very front of the platform, Ye Xiaolian raised her sword to

meet the whisk, a sword glow flashing over the platform.

Under the terrifying pressure of Wuqiong Bi, the plateau swiftly chilled and dimmed. In the face of this, the sword glow seemed rather fragile and tiny.

It was just like a little dinghy in the sea, liable at any moment to capsize and be swallowed up, leaving nothing behind.

Soon after, several more sword glows flashed, making the dim sky a little brighter.

The several small dinghies in the sea formed into a boat. It was still not very large, but it had become much firmer.

Several dozen sword glows soon joined them, simultaneously shining and making the gloomy sky seem like a clear day.

Those dinghies and boats were gathered together by the waves and transformed into a large ship that forged over the high waves and pierced through the sheets of rain in pursuit of a sliver of light.

They did not combine in a simple fashion.

Even if tens of thousands of dinghies gathered together and stacked themselves into a small mountain, they would still be scattered upon entering the sea, powerless to resist the wind and waves.

Only when they truly united could they become a massive ship that could meet the winds and break through the waves.

Several dozen sword glows of varying brightness illuminated the peak. Several dozen sword techniques slashed through the air, all of them responding to and communicating with each other, transforming into one.

This was an incredibly fast process, like water running through a canal, secretly in accord with the principles of nature. Most mystically, just like when wood was made into a boat, when these sword techniques came together, they began to release an

inexplicable strength, their energy suddenly soaring, their strength countless times more powerful than the power of a sword technique used by a single South Stream Temple disciple.

This was the world-renowned sword array of South Stream Temple!

A vast sword energy enveloped the plateau while sword glows illuminated the world, cut apart the dark clouds, and clashed with that unearthly horsetail whisk.

Awe-inspiring sword intent emerged, slashing at those lightning bolts and cracks in space, stopping that terrifying Qi of extinction.

Innumerable noises of tearing and explosions rose up almost simultaneously. However, most of the clashes resulted in true extinction, completely silent, but even more dangerous.

Fierce winds howled, the trees on the plateau bending westward as if burdened with an unbearable might.

The Mount Li Sword Sect, Scholartree Manor, and several other sects that were somewhat closer to this clash began to release Qi and activate magical artifacts so as to protect their disciples.

When the dust settled, Wuqiong Bi's figure appeared. She was still at her original place, having not advanced even a single step!

The sword array of the South Stream Temple formed from these several dozen girls had actually blocked an attack from an expert of the Divine Domain!

Three disciples had been intimidated by Wuqiong Bi's power, their Dao hearts unsettled, after which they were injured and left powerless to stand.

More cracks in the air could be heard as other disciples quickly rushed forth to change places with these three disciples, and to increase their confidence.

It was still not over.

Ping Xuan calmly ordered, "Form the sword array."

Before she had finished speaking, the South Stream Temple disciples that had been too late to act before quickly rushed forward.

For a moment, sword glows incessantly shone from the plateau and the hums of swords rang without end.

Three-hundred-some disciples of South Stream Temple had formed a complete sword array!

Their white dresses drifted in the wind like eternal and undying waves.

The awe-inspiring sword intent was like a thousand peaks that would never fall.

This was the true famous sword array of South Stream Temple!

.....

.....

The plateau was absolutely silent, shock still in everyone's eyes.

Many people had heard about South Stream Temple's sword array, but very few had personally witnessed it.

The sword array of South Stream Temple was truly as powerful as rumored. With just these Ethereal Opening disciples, they could block Wuqiong Bi, an expert of the Divine Domain!

Wuqiong Bi's face was brimming with ruthlessness. She knew how formidable South Stream Temple's sword array was. It was said that a thousand years ago, when Zhou Dufu, the strongest expert beneath the starry sky, invaded Holy Maiden Peak, he had needed quite some time to break South Stream Temple's sword array. Although she still had many strong techniques that she had not used, she could not possibly be more powerful than Zhou Dufu. However, no matter how formidable the sword array of South Stream Temple was, it could not halt her steps. She had to take

revenge for her most beloved son, so she had to kill Chen Changsheng today!

Just when she was prepared to attack the sword array once more, the situation changed.

"This prince believes that the most proper thing to do is to have Zhusha quickly appear and give her account from that day. Whether it was a misunderstanding or something else can be discussed afterward."

The Prince of Xiang rose from his chair, adjusted the bright yellow belt around his waist, took a few breaths, then smiled at Chen Changsheng. "Everyone knows that Your Holiness the Pope has a connection with your Protector. Presumably, it is not a difficult task to notify her, and a Black Frost Dragon can travel a thousand li in an instant. No matter where she is on the continent, she can presumably arrive today. If Your Holiness believes my proposal to be decent, then there will be no harm if everyone drinks a few cups of tea while we wait for her to arrive."

Bie Yanghong thought for a few moments, then replied, "Very well."

Wuqiong Bi naturally did not want this. Her face was rife with anger, but she chose to say nothing.

Everyone turned to Chen Changsheng. In their view, there was no problem with the Prince of Xiang's proposal—it truly was the most prudent approach.

But might the Pope be concerned for the little Black Dragon's safety, and not be willing to summon her, or was it... that he did not dare to summon her?

Chen Changsheng was quiet for a while, then replied, "I will not summon her to appear."

The crowd exploded into noise.

The Prince of Xiang's smile faded as he indifferently said, "Then

this prince truly cannot continue to support Your Holiness."

To not support was to oppose. Though not clearly stated, his stance was obvious.

This was his stance, and so one could interpret it as the Imperial Court's stance.

As the Prince of Xiang's voice echoed through the mountains, many people began to slowly stand.

Some of these people were experts of the Imperial Court, and several were blue-clothed Daoists from Luoyang's Monastery of Eternal Spring, and some were experts of sects that had long since thrown their lot in with the Imperial Court. In total, there were around several hundred people.

The most striking was the Divine General that had been sitting by the Prince of Xiang's side the entire time.

The Divine General had never spoken a single word and had an apathetic expression, but he attracted the attention of many people.

Because he had a very special characteristic. His two brows seemed dyed to be as white as snow, seemed to emit a chill.

It was also because of this special characteristic that many people recognized who he was.

The White Tiger Divine General, a peak-level Star Condensation Realm expert, ranked second of all the Divine Generals in the world!

Chapter 893 – To All the People of the World, I Am Roasting Fish by a Stream

The Imperial Court had made its stance known.

The White Tiger Divine General standing up with those several hundred experts was also a stance, and also incredibly intimidating.

The crowd became somewhat disorderly, with many sects turning to look at their companions around them to know which side they would choose.

Chen Changsheng watched this sight in silence, his thoughts inscrutable.

Hu Thirty-Two also felt that it would be best if the Pope could summon the Black Dragon to clearly explain this matter, but for some reason, the Pope refused to do so. He walked up to Chen Changsheng and softly said, "While protected by South Stream Temple's sword array, Your Holiness should summon Nanke and escape."

Chen Changsheng remained silent.

He had not expected that the foreboding he had felt yesterday in front of the stone wall at Holy Maiden Peak's summit would actually concern himself.

This was truly a terrifying plot. At present, he still could not find any obvious flaws.

He could already tell that this plot was not just about Bie Tianxin's death. There were more things concealed behind it.

Firstly, that person had succeeded in using the closing of South Stream Temple to disturb his mind and cause him to travel alone, resulting in him falling into today's encirclement on this plateau. If it had been like in Wenshui City, where he had brought several

thousand Orthodoxy cavalry and Linghai Zhiwang and An Lin at his side, treasures of the Orthodoxy in hand, what would he have to fear?

And then that person had used the Black Frost Dragon's Deep Freeze Dragon Breath to kill Bie Tianxin, causing Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi to firmly believe that the true culprit was the Black Dragon, and that person had known beforehand that he was unable to summon Zhizhi to give her account. As a result, Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi confirmed that he was the schemer of this assassination, creating the current situation.

Only Divine Domain experts like Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi, grief-stricken over the death of their son, would dare to attack the Pope. And it was only in this situation that the Prince of Xiang and the Imperial Court would have sufficient excuse, resulting in his being surrounded.

Yes, it was not that Chen Changsheng was unwilling to summon Zhizhi, but that he could not summon her.

When Bie Yanghong stretched out his right hand and he saw those grains of ice imbued with the Deep Freeze Dragon Breath, he had already attempted to communicate with her through the connection in their souls.

But no message came back.

Based on their plan and the time that had passed, Zhizhi should be in White Emperor City and was probably not in danger.

But at this moment, he could only sense that she was still alive. He could not communicate with her, much less summon her to Holy Maiden Peak.

This was clearly a part of the actual schemer's meticulous preparations, which had seemingly calculated everything he could possibly do.

Just who was this person?

Chen Changsheng looked at the Prince of Xiang and the White Tiger Divine General, as well as those blue-clothed Daoists and experts of the Imperial Court, and thought, the instigator of this is not Master, but Master must have known of this matter, and was deeply involved. But... does Master really want me to die this much? Does he still want me to die so badly?

It now appeared that this was truly his last chance to leave.

But he could not leave, as he could not leave those South Stream Temple disciples standing in front of him to struggle alone. He had promised Xu Yourong that he would help her protect Holy Maiden Peak.

The plateau was deathly still.

The White Tiger Divine General gazed impassively at him from the distance.

Those blue-clothed Daoists from the Monastery of Eternal Spring were also impassively watching him.

Several hundred experts of the Imperial Court and various sects were also gazing impassively at him.

The Prince of Xiang was impassively looking at him.

Wuqiong Bi was impassively looking at him.

Everyone was impassively gazing at him.

It seemed like time had frozen, the clouds, mountains, trees, and cliffs losing all color and vitality.

The mood on the plateau was incredibly oppressive and tense.

"Senior Brother, what should we do?"

Bai Cai looked at the surrounding crowd and nervously asked.

He did not know Chen Changsheng, much less that evil dragon of legend, so he naturally wasn't willing to step up. However, as a disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect, he naturally wanted to protect

his martial sisters of South Stream Temple. At the moment, almost everyone on the plateau was standing opposed to Chen Changsheng and South Stream Temple, so what could Mount Li do with its small group?

Gou Hanshi looked at the nervous disciples of South Stream Temple and said, "If something unforeseen occurs, we naturally have to unsheathe our swords and assist."

All the evidence available pointed to Chen Changsheng, but Gou Hanshi had never once thought that Chen Changsheng would really kill Bie Tianxin, because he knew that Chen Changsheng was not that sort of person.

Bai Cai thought that he understood his senior brother's meaning. His right hand rested on his hilt as he gravely said, "Be at ease, Senior Brother. Even if I give up my life, I will protect our martial sisters."

Gou Hanshi said, "I was talking about His Holiness."

Bai Cai was shocked. He looked to him and asked, "Then... what would Eldest Brother think?"

"If Senior Brother were here, he would do the same."

Gou Hanshi added, "Of course, Senior Brother's intelligence far surpasses yours or mine. If he were here, he might have already found a method to resolve this matter."

.....

.....

The situation on the plateau was extremely tense and was highly likely to fall into a bitter and chaotic battle. However, this had no effect on the other places of Holy Maiden Peak.

At the foot of Holy Maiden Peak was a stream with water so clear that one could see the bottom. Two people were currently seated on a stone at the stream's edge, roasting and eating fish. The

slightly scorched aroma of the cooked fish drifted very far, attracting the cries of several birds and causing a few nearby shrubs to rustle.

The Qiushan clan head took a stick of roast fish and gave it a thorough examination. Upon confirming that it was not drugged, he took a bite.

"Why'd you take the trouble to come? You must know that if you miss such a good chance today, you really will incur the wrath of the heavens."

He looked at the person sitting by the fire and said, "You banished yourself for five years already. If you don't do something now, and let things continue like this, the world will only know of Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng. They won't possibly remember the name of Qiushan Jun."

The man roasting fish was Qiushan Jun, and also Luo Bu of Sloping Cliff Horse Farm.

After leaving Wenshui City, he had returned to Mount Li. Under the fierce implorations of his junior sister, he had finally shaved off all of his beard, revealing his true face.

It was very difficult to describe Qiushan Jun's face. To put it briefly, even the Qiushan clan head would have some second thoughts every time he saw the son that was his pride, often wondering, how did I father such a handsome son?

Qiushan Jun took out the second roast fish and took a satisfied bite. In a somewhat muffled voice, he said, "It's not like I live so that I can be remembered by others."

The Qiushan clan head snapped back, "Then go into seclusion. What are you doing here?"

Qiushan Jun chuckled but said nothing.

The Qiushan clan head became even angrier at this, saying, "If I hadn't come specially to stop you, you would probably already be

on the mountain."

Qiushan Jun said, "It's presumably quite exciting on the mountain. I just want to take a look."

The Qiushan clan head grumbled, "Do you really think that you can trick your father? You just want to help Chen Changsheng break out of this trap. Really, how did I, a selfish and crafty person with a mind full of evil tricks, manage to father a fellow like you, so moral, warm-hearted and high-minded?"

Qiushan Jun couldn't help but laugh, and replied, "Father, these words are truly interesting."

The Qiushan clan head angrily replied, "Don't you go worrying about what's interesting and not interesting. Just tell me if what I say is right or wrong."

"Correct, I truly was prepared to go up the mountain and end that scheme."

Qiushan Jun explained, "Because I think the person who made that scheme is insulting my intelligence."

Chapter 894 – Give Up or Surrender?

The Qiushan clan head was somewhat astonished, saying, "I don't know who the designer of this trap is, but I do know that this matter has nothing to do with you."

Qiushan Jun put his roast fish on the rock and very seriously explained, "Father, it's like this. If this plan succeeds, doesn't that mean that Chen Changsheng is very stupid?"

The Qiushan clan head replied, "Perhaps Chen Changsheng might be somewhat talented in the art of the sword and cultivation, but in terms of resourcefulness, he's not even fit to carry your shoes."

Qiushan Jun somewhat helplessly said, "I'm not intending to go up the mountain, so there's no need for Father to use these methods to waste time."

The Qiushan clan head smiled from ear to ear and said, "Stupid."

This was an answer to the earlier question.

Qiushan Jun said, "It's common knowledge that Yourong loves Chen Changsheng. If Chen Changsheng is really a coarse and stupid fellow, doesn't that mean that Yourong is also very stupid?"

The Qiushan clan head pondered this question, then replied, "This sort of conjecture doesn't have much basis, but it must be said that some people really might think this way."

Qiushan Jun continued, "That settles it. If Yourong is very stupid, then aren't I, who loves her, even more stupid?"

The Qiushan clan head found himself somewhat powerless to refute this. He said, "Even if you want to help Chen Changsheng break out of this trap, you don't have any evidence. Could you possibly be planning to do like you did in Wenshui City and use up your reputation? It's not easy to raise a reputation! You can't just waste it on trifling matters like these, and that fellow is also your

rival."

Qiushan Jun laughed and said no more, putting all his focus on eating his roasted fish.

.....

.....

At the summit of Holy Maiden Peak, clear light shone over all, and a gentle breeze blew against the ivy on the stone walls, causing it to rustle. Soon after, the lush forest began to rustle as well, as countless spirit beasts emerged from the shrubs and pine needles, opening their glossy black eyes and looking towards the stone wall, apparently sensing that something significant was about to occur. Even more rare birds began to fly from the lush peaks of the Luomei Mountains and continuously circle the summit, forming a gorgeous ribbon.

In the cave in the depths of the wall, the crystals spread out like sand over the ground still twinkled with a dazzling luster, and the flat bed carved completely from jade was even more striking. However, most striking of all was still that peerless beauty seated cross-legged on the jade bed.

Xu Yourong's eyes were closed in meditation. Her skin was as white as the purest snow, looking tender enough to break with a pinch. In the reflected light of the crystals, it practically seemed transparent. Her delicate eyelashes calmly rested over her eyes, as beautiful as the first green leaves sprouting from the camphor trees on the cliffs.

At some point, perhaps when the gentle breeze blew against the ivy on the stone wall, her delicate lashes fluttered, and then she woke up. At first, those two moving eyes were still tinged with a little confusion, appearing as innocent and honest as a child's.

As time passed like water over her mind and body, the confusion in her eyes gradually dulled, returning to indifference and

serenity. Just like the drizzle of rain that fell over the mountains and forests in the Qingming season, bursting with a refreshing aura. A single glance would make one unwilling to leave. (TN: The Chinese calendar divides the year into 24 solar terms, of which the Qingming Festival marks the beginning of the fifth solar term, the Qingming season, and also the third month of the Chinese year. The Qingming season is fifteen days from the Spring Equinox.)

Her gaze fell on the Fated Star Plate before her. The complicated star orbits on the Fated Star Plate began to cycle, silently gathering together and dispersing. In a very short amount of time, it produced thirty-some star atlases, and the final region of the sea of stars it pointed at was the most vast, mysterious, and dangerous.

She became solemn and shifted her gaze to the potted flower to her right.

This was a garishly bright flower, a large red blossom magnificently flourishing amidst extremely tender green leaves. Green leaves contrasting with a red blossom should have made for the most common of beautiful sights, yet because both were brought to an extremely high level, their beauty was refined to a higher level, a moving sight that was seemingly even suffused with the principles of the world.

Commonness brought to great heights was not guaranteed to become great elegance. On many occasions, it was impossible to do so. If one accomplished this feat, that could only mean one thing: the Great Dao was not far.

As she gazed at these green leaves and red flower, Xu Yourong had a rather mixed expression.

After a while, she dispelled all other emotions, leaving only indifference and serenity.

This was what it truly meant to be firm and unwavering.

But she couldn't help but feel somewhat regretful.

She faintly smiled. "Alas, it is truly a pity to not be able to fully bloom."

.....

.....

The ceremony for closing the temple was not held at Holy Maiden Peak, but on a plateau ten-some li away.

When Qiushan Jun was eating roast fish, when Xu Yourong was appreciating the flower and comprehending the Dao, Chen Changsheng was confronting a most perilous trial.

Everyone now believed that Zhizhi had killed Bie Tianxin. He naturally knew that this wasn't the case, but he had no evidence, and couldn't even have Zhizhi appear to give evidence. Thus, many people thought that he was showing a guilty conscience, practically proof that he was the true instigator of that assassination on the river.

The disciples of South Stream Temple had formed the sword array and stood guard in front of him. There were presumably still some people willing to support him, like Gou Hanshi and the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect or Scholartree Manor, but compared to the Imperial Court represented by the Prince of Xiang and those sects that followed the Imperial Court's orders, they were far too few in number. Crucially, his opponents this time were Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi, two experts of the Divine Domain. Moreover, this pair were so stricken with sorrow by the death of their son that they simply didn't care about his status.

Just how could Chen Changsheng resolve this situation? Did he really have to depend on South Stream Temple's sword array to guard him while he availed himself of the chaos to escape? It had to be said that no matter how powerful the sword array was, it could not resist the simultaneous strikes of experts like these for too long, especially given the number of opponents today.

Everyone wanted to know what he would choose, their minds continuously guessing.

But his choice still caught everyone by surprise.

Chen Changsheng looked at Bie Yanghong and said, "I understand that all evidence points to me and Zhusha, but I myself naturally know that this matter was not her doing, much less on my order. However, I am willing to depart with Sir, and until this matter is investigated fully, I will remain with you."

This choice was so shocking that many people couldn't speak.

Following was not some simple action but meant that he was giving up and putting his life completely in Bie Yanghong's hands.

To the Pope, this was naturally an enormous humiliation. And more importantly, what if Bie Yanghong simply killed him?

The archbishop from the southern church, his expression instantly changing, said in a trembling voice, "Your Holiness, this cannot be allowed."

Ping Xuan and the other South Stream Temple disciples were also shocked, wondering, just how is this okay? Hu Thirty-Two also showed his displeasure. As an archbishop, he could not possibly allow the safety of the Pope to be put in the hands of another. Tang Thirty-Six and Gou Hanshi, however, remained silent and pensive.

Of the people present, Tang Thirty-Six and Gou Hanshi were the ones that understood Chen Changsheng the most.

They knew that Chen Changsheng would never have Holy Maiden Peak run with rivers of blood today and cause countless deaths just for his own safety. Thus, if he wanted to resolve this matter, this was the only way. It was just that nobody knew if choosing to entrust himself to Bie Yanghong was a successfully taken risk or a foolish gamble.

Bie Yanghong had a very composed personality and a noble

character, but he was still a father. Might not the grief from the death of his son cause him to do something crazy?

Chapter 895 – The Breaker of the Array, an Ant

The plateau gradually fell silent, everyone turning to Bie Yanghong, wondering whether he would accept Chen Changsheng's offer.

Logically speaking, there was no reason for Bie Yanghong not to accept, because there were no disadvantages for him.

Bie Yanghong calmly asked Chen Changsheng, "You are so sure that I won't kill you on the spot?"

Chen Changsheng calmly replied, "If Senior does not want the true culprit to escape, Senior naturally won't kill me."

Wuqiong Bi harshly said, "Cease your unnecessary complication! I certainly won't trust a villain like you! As long as you dare to come out of the sword array, I'll beat you to death!"

Chen Changsheng ignored her. He only calmly gazed at Bie Yanghong, waiting for his answer.

Bie Yanghong remained quiet for a very long time, apparently somewhat willing.

The plateau was extremely quiet. Truly no one had expected Chen Changsheng to use this method to break this apparently flawless trap.

This was a seemingly simple method, but it required an unimaginable frankness and fearlessness. It was a method that could not be used by someone who did not have both great intelligence and courage.

But some people were not willing to let this continue.

Like the instigator of this scheme, like the participants of this scheme.

The Prince of Xiang stood in the distance, by the edge of the plateau, his hands behind his back as he observed the activity at the platform. A wariness appeared in his eyes, and he took a light step forward.

To many people, this was just a tiny and unremarkable step, perhaps just a sign that the prince was anxious to hear Bie Yanghong's answer.

To some other people, this small step was a clear signal that the current situation needed to take a giant step forward.

Wind howled as it erupted from the cliffs below, breaking through the array and causing the trees to sway and dust to rise.

The White Tiger Divine General raised his right foot and walked forward. When the bottom of his boot struck the ground, the gray stone crumbled into a web of cracks.

He broke through the dust and landed several hundred zhang away.

This step was truly a giant one.

His pupils were as black as the abyss while a cold and violent Qi covered his entire body. He raised his metal spear and thrust it at South Stream Temple's sword array.

As the current second-ranked Divine General, although he was not up to Xue Xingchuan's level, he was still frightening enough.

The spear tore a straight path through the air, leaving countless white swirls in the air as it thundered towards the South Stream Temple disciples.

In the face of this peak Star Condensation expert, in the face of this fiercest of spear intents, the South Stream Temple disciples were somewhat disorderly as they adjusted positions.

It was not because the White Tiger Divine General was stronger than Wuqiong Bi, but because he had attacked too suddenly.

Moreover, everyone knew that this attack symbolized the Imperial Court's will. This spear was thrust at the sword array, but was its target not the hearts of the South Stream Temple disciples?

Bie Yanghong remained undistracted. He continued to stare into Chen Changsheng's eyes as if wanting to see into his sea of consciousness.

The Prince of Xiang supported his somewhat plump waist as a hint of ruthlessness flashed in his eyes. He sternly yelled, "Sir, please think again!"

No one knew what he wanted Bie Yanghong to think again about. Was it not to kill Chen Changsheng, or was it not to accept Chen Changsheng's proposal?

But everyone on the plateau did hear his voice, because it was an incredibly loud voice, like the ringing of a bell.

The people near the platform were especially affected. A few disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect and scholars of Scholartree Manor with somewhat shallow cultivation instantly paled and felt like vomiting. The South Stream Temple disciples in the sword array felt like four claps of thunder had exploded next to their ears. Their Dao hearts were slightly unsettled, their hands trembling.

The Blazing Sun Style! Booming Voice!

The White Tiger Divine General's fierce spear was approaching and the Prince of Xiang had used the Imperial clan's secret technique to oppress them. The South Stream Temple sword array was placed under a terrifying pressure.

But if it was just these, the disciples of South Stream Temple would still be able to endure, still be able to keep Chen Changsheng safe behind them. The White Tiger Divine General and the Prince of Xiang had not truly acted, and the energy of this spear and a long-distance attack of the Blazing Sun Style were not enough to break through this renowned sword array.

But to the surprise of the South Stream Temple disciples, and to the surprise of Chen Changsheng, just when the sword array had restabilized, two things happened.

The Prince of Xiang's Booming Voice suddenly vanished, leaving not even an echo behind. He faintly smiled as if he had not even spoken.

The White Tiger Divine General's spear energy also suddenly vanished. The spear fell back to the ground as if the general had never struck.

The sword array was currently shifting its energy in the direction of the Zhen Star, an awe-inspiring sword energy rising. Just as it was prepared to attack, it realized that its opponents had suddenly vanished, resulting in the shifting of the sword array being a tiny bit sluggish.

It was in this instant that a wispy figure suddenly rushed out from the back of the sword array!

It was Huai Bi!

The world's most resilient and imposing cities were often broken from within.

No one could have expected that this martial grandaunt of highest seniority would suddenly ally herself with outsiders and break her own sect's sword array.

Even Huai Ren and Huai Shu appeared rather bewildered. Is Junior Sister doing this because she's not willing to see her disciples fight and kill for the Li Palace?

If an enemy were able to successfully break the sword array by forcing their way in, then the sword array of South Stream Temple would not have such a famous reputation around the world.

If someone were to attempt to break the sword array from within, they would actually encounter the sword array's most powerful killing technique. For instance, Huai Bi had borrowed the

attacks of the Prince of Xiang and the White Tiger Divine General to infiltrate the sword array, but as long as the sword array activated, that awe-inspiring sword Qi enveloping the plateau would only need a few strikes to kill her.

But some of the disciples in the sword array were Huai Bi's martial nieces, and some of them were her personal disciples, and even more were her granddisciples. How could they possibly kill her? A great deal of disciples could only watch in shock, clueless as to what to do. If they were to attack with full force, would they not be killing their martial grandaunt or grandteacher?

The disciples of South Stream Temple did not know what to do, but Huai Bi did not hesitate. She struck like lightning, her finger descending like a mountain. In just a few seconds, she had wounded several disciples and snatched away the swords of ten-some others. These swords were then thrown off the mountain, drawing streams of light in the air as they were cast away.

With no sword in hand, how could one create a sword array?

The sword array of South Stream Temple, famed throughout the world, was suddenly thrown into chaos, a massive gap appearing in it.

Standing in the center of the plateau, Wuqiong Bi once more laid eyes on Chen Changsheng, no longer protected by the sword array, and her hate was renewed, her anger rekindled. She could not let such a good opportunity go, and she certainly did not care for Chen Changsheng's proposal. She flew through the air, her horsetail whisk stirring cold and horrifying waves of extinction as it slapped towards Chen Changsheng.

"Brigand, pay with your life!"

.....

.....

How could one block the full-force attack of an expert of the

Divine Domain?

There was no good answer for this question.

Whether it was Wang Po in Xunyang City or Chen Changsheng on that night in the mountains, with their mortal bodies, they seemed able to resist one or two attacks from a Divine Domain expert, but those had been for special reasons. Zhu Luo had never attacked Wang Po with his full power while the Demon Lord was still heavily injured and was not even at one-tenth of his peak.

Today was different. Wuqiong Bi was not injured, and for the sake of revenge, her power was at its peak. This attack could even be said to be the strongest in her entire life.

Chen Changsheng was still hiding countless tricks, still had countless treasures, still had countless helpers.

But at this moment, none of them were of any use.

Chapter 896 – The Hopeless Situation After Three Sword Techniques

Chen Changsheng knew that even if he used all his moves, it was impossible for him to block these cold waves of silent extinction.

He had only one choice: retreat.

The problem was that an expert of the Divine Domain could freely travel through the world, their speed greater than could be imagined by a normal person. Only extremely talented people like Nanke, Xu Yourong, or Jin Yulu might be able to barely maintain such a speed for a period, but who could be faster?

Wuqiong Bi flew up in front of the platform, her horsetail whisk on the verge of descending.

Chen Changsheng suddenly vanished and appeared several dozen zhang away in front of the mountain path, Stainless Sword in hand.

Wuqiong Bi's intimidating pressure continued forward, the aura of silent extinction enveloping the world as it pressed forward. The mountain path suddenly crumbled, countless cracks spreading across the stone steps.

One could see a vivid sword glow over the plateau. Chen Changsheng appeared at one end of this sword glow, already two-hundred-some zhang away.

The Qi of silent extinction pursued him like a harrying rain cloud.

When he was just about to be struck by this Qi, Chen Changsheng disappeared once more. Carrying an awe-inspiring sword intent that could tear through the air, he arrived at a stone outcrop on the edge of the plateau.

Wuqiong Bi's horsetail whisk had still not been able to descend,

as it had failed to lock onto his body.

He did not have the speed of Nanke or Xu Yourong. He was able to move so quickly because he was not using a movement technique, but something that he was most skilled at: sword techniques.

At the moment that South Stream Temple's sword array fell into disorder and Wuqiong Bi flew through the sky, he had unsheathed the Stainless Sword.

And then, he had unhesitatingly used three sword techniques. There was no pause in this process, not even a thought required.

These three techniques were the True Sword of the Orthodoxy, the final move of the Mount Li Sword Style, and Hanging Sunset of the Three Forms of Wenshui.

These were the three most resolute sword techniques he had mastery over. Of course, he also added the Yeshe Step into the mix.

Everyone who saw this was deeply shocked.

Many people knew that Chen Changsheng was talented in the sword, with some people even willing to call him a grandmaster of the sword, despite his age.

However, not many people had personally seen him use a sword. Only today did they realize that the Pope's cultivation in the path of the sword was truly unfathomable. In the face of a full-force attack from an expert of the Divine Domain, he could use his sword energy to move around, his response seemingly natural and unrestrained.

In the blink of an eye, Chen Changsheng was several li away, at the edge of a cliff. He had succeeded in avoiding Wuqiong Bi's most furious killing move.

But his sword energy was exhausted, and even worse, he had been pushed by Wuqiong Bi into a geographical dead end. How could he continue to retreat?

Wuqiong Bi flew to the sky above him. Her pressure was a little weaker than before, but her killing intent was even greater!

The world resonated with her, dark clouds enveloping the mountain, causing the light to dim.

A harsh and spiteful howl tore through the dark clouds, resounding through the world.

"Die!"

She waved the horsetail whisk down towards Chen Changsheng.

The threads of the horsetail whisk crackled with tiny arcs of lightning as they madly beat against the air.

These arcs of lightning illuminated her pale cheeks, stained through and through with loathing. She seemed like a ferocious ghost, striking fear in the hearts of onlookers.

Right when the horsetail whisk was about to hit Chen Changsheng, a sword glow once more swept across the gloomy sky.

This sword glow was not particularly bright, and actually seemed rather dim, but it gave off a rather reliable feeling.

The Stainless Sword had already been joined with the Vault Sheath, turning into a long sword.

This was the strongest form of the Stainless Sword, and it was also the form Chen Changsheng would choose whenever he was in a hopeless situation.

The sword glow did not come from the swinging of the sword, but from the sword itself.

Chen Changsheng's left hand gripped the hilt while his right hand held the tip of the sword as he held it horizontally in front of him.

His hands were extremely steady, not trembling in the slightest.

His sword was like a chain, or a river dike.

This was the third sword style Su Li had passed down to him, that was now famous throughout the world: the Stupid Sword!

.....

.....

The horsetail whisk fell upon the sword.

In a few seconds, the bright surface of the sword, which seemed like it had been washed by water ten thousand times, showed several extremely minuscule hints of corrosion.

The Stainless Sword was forged from the most precious dragon whisker of the Golden Dragon. It was absolutely smooth and would not be stained by the slightest filth or blood. It was absolutely firm and would not be damaged by any object. The Golden Dragon's whisker could be described as the perfect material to make a sword from. From the moment the Stainless Sword appeared, it was ranked on the Tier of Legendary Weapons, but now it seemed like it could not endure. Why?

Those signs of corrosion came from the lightning and the fierce Qi of silent extinction suffused in the horsetail whisk.

The lightning and Qi were not actually damaging the Stainless Sword, but they had already destroyed the sword intent that Chen Changsheng had placed on it.

The fierce Qi of silent extinction that came from the bottomless depths of the sea easily destroyed the clear and calm sword intent from Xining Village's old temple.

This did not mean that the former was more profound than the latter, but that Wuqiong Bi's cultivation level was far above Chen Changsheng's.

This threshold was too high, and it was forged from steel, impossible to easily cross. Anyone who attempted to cross it with just courage and daring would end up battered and beaten.

There was a massive boom.

Fierce winds howled across the plateau, shredding several wutong trees into splinters. Ten-some cultivators who had not been able to flee in time were sent flying off the cliff. Their howls of terror were suddenly silenced. Their meridians had presumably been severed in the air, severing their lives as well.

The sword intent was shattered, powerless to continue. The Stainless Sword and the Vault Sheath were jolted back, striking Chen Changsheng in the stomach.

With a thud, Chen Changsheng was smashed into an outcrop of rock, sending shards of rock flying everywhere. His face was pale, his expression somewhat dark.

If not for the fact that he had used the three sword techniques to avoid Wuqiong Bi's attack when it was at its strongest, he would assuredly be heavily injured and almost powerless to rise.

Of course, the most important reason was that he had been bathed in the true blood of the Black Frost Dragon. Even a body that had undergone a perfect Purification would not have endured.

A scream suffused with ruthlessness burst from Wuqiong Bi's thin lips.

This scream was brimming with pleasure from killing one's hated foe, and also endless loathing.

She would not give Chen Changsheng a single chance to counter, nor a chance for anyone else to save him.

Her horsetail whisk exuded endless waves of Qi, and their aura of silent extinction descended towards Chen Changsheng.

Innumerable green lotuses manifested in the air, cutting off the surroundings.

Gou Hanshi's expression shifted. Brimming with star radiance, he flew through the air. His sword was already in hand, but it was

clear that he was too late.

Hu Thirty-Two and the archbishop from the southern church were also rushing over.

The South Stream Temple disciples were even more surprised, their faces paling as they gasped in surprise. They wanted to hurry over, but they ended up even slower.

At this moment, who could save Chen Changsheng?

Strangely, Tang Thirty-Six did not move. He stared at the ruthless red in the very center of the plateau, his hand gripping his most powerful protective magical artifact as he seemed to ponder something.

Strangely, Bie Yanghong also did not move. He quietly gazed someplace beyond the plateau as if still considering Chen Changsheng's proposal.

Regardless of what he felt, since his wife was about to kill the enemy who had killed his son, he should have been watching.

Just what was he thinking? Just where was he looking? Or was he waiting for someone?

Chapter 897 – Within the Great Light, the Phoenix Comes

In the view of the Prince of Xiang and a few other more informed people, Bie Yanghong was standing guard for Wuqiong Bi.

Chen Changsheng was no ordinary person.

He was the Pope.

If one wanted to kill a Pope, one might encounter the most unexpected of accidents.

If one wanted to kill a Pope, one had to obstruct all accidents.

Like that blade.

At this point, still no one knew whether that blade had come to Holy Maiden Peak or not. Similarly, no one knew whether that blade might suddenly drop from the sky without warning and cleave apart everything in the world that its wielder wanted to cleave, just like it did in the capital within the Luo River.

.....

.....

Just who could save him now? Chen Changsheng had never thought of this question.

While at Wenshui City, he knew that the blade was outside the city, because that had been at his request.

But he had been in too much of a rush when traveling from Fengyang City to Holy Maiden Peak, so he had not had a chance to inform the wielder of that blade. Moreover, ever since he had learned of his fate at the age of ten, whenever he faced any dangerous situations, like that darkness that symbolized death, he was accustomed to facing them alone.

Placing his hopes on another meant that he had no control over

his own fate.

He did not want to be this sort of person; he was not this sort of person.

From start to finish, he had always placed his hopes in his own hands.

Seeing that sea of lotuses concealing limitless danger, sensing that Qi of silent extinction, he knew that he could no longer hide his strength.

When facing a Divine Domain expert, any schemes or hidden tricks represented disdain, for which there was certain to be punishment.

His right hand maintained its grip on the hilt. The countless swords in his sheath were ready to come out at any moment and assail the sky.

His left hand was raised, the monsters in the Garden of Zhou ready to come out at any moment and wash over the mountains like a tide.

In the Garden of Zhou, Nanke was ready.

On his wrist, the Heavenly Tome Monoliths were ready.

He believed that Zhexiu, who had yet to appear, was also ready.

There was also the Yellow Paper Umbrella, the Falling Star Stone, the Divine Staff of the Orthodoxy.

No one had ever seen all of Chen Changsheng's tricks.

Even on that night in the snowy mountains, when confronting the legendary Demon Lord, he still had many tricks that he had not used.

In his original plans, these tricks should have been used on a certain elder.

It now seemed that they would have to show themselves to the

world right now.

Even so, could he block the all-out attack of a Divine Domain expert?

He was not confident, because that threshold was truly very high.

The world was also not confident, or else why would so many people be rushing over to him?

Those people were worried, or despairing, or perhaps already beginning to grieve?

Suddenly, the world changed colors.

The thick dark clouds were suddenly painted with a smear of golden light.

The gloomy sky suddenly became incomparably bright.

The mountain forests began to burn.

Worry, despair, and grief were all supplanted by shock.

Everyone looked up to the sky.

A streak of fire appeared in the sky.

This streak of fire was very long, rising from that place shrouded in clouds.

The people from South Stream Temple could all guess that it was coming from Holy Maiden Peak.

The streak of fire extended towards the plateau with unimaginable speed, like some meteor descending from the heavens and leaving a fiery trail in its wake.

No one had time to react. They could only watch as the streak of fire descended at the edge of the plateau.

The pieces of the shattered wutong trees suddenly burst into flame, scattering sparks, light, and heat in every direction.

A pair of breathtakingly beautiful Phoenix wings were dancing in the fire!

A resoundingly bright Phoenix cry echoed through the world!

Flames bursting with an unimaginable vigor shot towards the lotus sea of silent extinction.

Countless sword silhouettes flickered in these flames, rising and falling, yet they did not seem treacherous. On the contrary, they seemed upright and frank, dignified and holy to the extreme.

The two Qis collided, unleashing a sound like some invisible and massive bell being rung by a god returning to the sea of stars. This fierce noise could even be heard several dozen li away, on the Tong River.

Countless waves stirred on the surface of the river. The fishermen on their boats and villages in their homes all kneeled in shock and began to pray.

Some of the cultivators on the plateau that were a little too close and had weak cultivations were knocked unconscious by the shock.

After some time, the terrifying Qi turbulences gradually settled, the blazing sparks extinguished, the light faded.

Upon seeing those still dignified and powerful sword intents in the light and the incredibly exquisite sword slashes, many people recalled a famous sight.

It was from several years ago, on the capital's Bridge of Helplessness, a battle in the snow.

Upon seeing the slender figure in the smoke, the crowd was flabbergasted and began to slowly understand what had happened.

Countless sword intents lay in the light, and as the dust settled, they began to combine into a single sword.

As expected, it was the legendary Sword of Great Light!

As expected, it was Holy Maiden Xu Yourong!

.....

.....

Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng stood side by side at the cliff's edge, confronting Wuqiong Bi.

Chen Changsheng gripped the Stainless Sword while Xu Yourong held the temple sword.

Their faces were somewhat pale. They had probably been injured, but their expressions were still calm.

The plateau was absolutely silent, everyone too shocked to speak. They simply couldn't believe their own eyes, feeling that everything was an illusion.

The Holy Maiden had left her seclusion early!

Did she not know how great was the price she had paid? That this might inflict almost irreparable harm to her cultivation? The crowd turned to Chen Changsheng and guessed at the reason she had left seclusion early, finally confirmed that those rumors were true. Their emotions became extremely complex. There was admiration, yearning, and of course, a great deal of envy.

Of course, there was another possibility: Xu Yourong had entered the Divine Domain and so had left her seclusion. But who could accomplish such a feat in two short years? Chen Xuanba had not done this, nor had Emperor Taizong, nor had Wang Zhice, and not even Zhou Dufu had done it.

Reality proved that Xu Yourong truly had not succeeded. As that light gradually faded, the Qi she exuded became more distinct. Although it was pure, holy, and exquisite, there was an untraversable gap between it and that threshold. If this was the case, just how had she managed to block the all-out blow of an expert of the Divine Domain?

This was what truly shocked the crowd.

The most shocked of all was Wuqiong Bi, because she was the one being blocked.

She looked at Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng standing side by side, her face slightly pale, her eyes incredibly dark.

The temple sword was truly formidable. Containing limitless sword intent and infinite light, purely in terms of technique, it could be called the world's most formidable sword style.

But this was not enough to give Xu Yourong even the possibility of blocking an attack with all of Wuqiong Bi's strength behind it.

Under the absolute suppression of cultivation level, the most exquisite of sword styles was meaningless.

But just when she intended to use the Dao of silent extinction contained in her lotus sea to suppress Xu Yourong, another sword intent joined the battle.

It was naturally Chen Changsheng's sword.

With Chen Changsheng's sword intent entering the fray, Xu Yourong's Sword of Great Light unexpectedly became even more harmonious, practically reaching perfection.

It was such that each swing of the temple sword was faintly fused with the aura of the Divine!

What made Wuqiong Bi even more surprised and uneasy was that the energy of the Sword of Great Light suddenly exploded at that moment, becoming several times stronger!

Just what was going on here?

Chapter 898 – Unity Sword Art

Wuqiong Bi could not think of an answer, could not understand how the combined might of these two juniors was able to resist the attack that was the sum of all her cultivation.

Though the attacker, even she had not been able to understand, so those people on the plateau who had not gotten a clear picture would naturally be even more confused.

In truth, not even Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong themselves completely understood what had happened.

They glanced at each other. They had some guesses, but they didn't dare voice them.

"This is impossible!"

Furious and unwilling to the extreme, Wuqiong Bi swung her horsetail whisk down once more. The green lotus leaves madly swayed, unleashing countless waves of silent extinction. Massive waves rose up on the surface of the sea and rampaged towards the cliff, as if the laws of the world were enveloping this plateau.

The weaker cultivators couldn't even think about resisting. The mere sight caused their Dao hearts to crumble into fine powder and drained them of any intent to fight.

Gou Hanshi, Hu Thirty-Two, and the others knew that there was no longer any hope of breaking apart this battle, so they stopped at the perimeter.

The battle had entered its most crucial moment. Tang Thirty-Six could not restrain his emotions, and tore his gaze away from Bie Yanghong to look over.

The disciples of South Stream Temple, the experts of the Imperial Court, the Guardians of the two great clans, the elders of the sects of the south... everyone was watching.

The cultivators on the plateau had their own standpoints and biases, but at this moment, everyone miraculously felt the same anticipation.

This sort of matter had never occurred before. It was such an astonishing matter that even the thought of it was absurd.

But today, everyone had personally witnessed such a sight. Since it had already happened once, would it happen again?

The wind crazily howled as Wuqiong Bi's horsetail whisk brought that seemingly real yet unreal sea of lotuses in a wave of extinction towards Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

The temple sword flew through the sky, shining countless rays of holy light on that sea of lotuses, a radiant and enchanting sight.

At the same time, or perhaps only at certain brief moments, the Stainless Sword flew behind those shards of light, following close behind the temple sword, blazing with countless flames, a bright and beautiful image.

The two sword glows complemented each other, illuminating the gloomy lotus sea.

The two sword intents resonated with each other, growing even more powerful than before, their awesome might cutting out a gap in the aura of extinction enveloping the plateau.

The two sword techniques of Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong seemed to combine into one. To put it another way, their swords seemed to become one.

Their sword energy grew many times more powerful, even able to cut open the true laws of the world imbued in the lotus sea!

Dust suddenly rose and gradually settled.

Chen Changsheng stood in front of Xu Yourong, blood trickling from the corner of his mouth and his clothes sporting several new tears. He had suffered significant injuries.

Xu Yourong's hair was somewhat disordered. Several strands of black hair were drifting in the wind, half-obscuring her beautiful eyes.

Wuqiong Bi was also in a rather sorry state. The front lapel of her Daoist robe had been cut off, her topknot had been loosened, and her hair dropped onto her shoulders, blown to and fro by the wind.

None of this was important.

The important thing was that Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong had not retreated a single step.

Wuqiong Bi had not advanced a single step

The two sides had fought to a draw.

Everyone could see this, but no one could believe it, even though this was the second time they had seen it.

Two cultivators still not in the Divine Domain had actually engaged in a direct confrontation with a Divine Domain expert and fought to a draw!

They had not relied on any divine artifacts, only on their cultivation in the path of the sword!

Such an event had never occurred in all of history!

Starting from when the Heavenly Tome Monoliths descended to the Central Continent, such a thing had never happened!

.....

.....

The plateau remained quiet. No one spoke, all of them too shocked.

Whether it was Gou Hanshi or the Vice Principal of Scholartree Manor, whether it was the Old Lady of the Mutuo clan or the head of the Wu clan, whether it was the White Tiger Divine General or the Prince of Xiang, they were all too shocked to speak.

No one noticed that in one corner of the plateau, a cultivator of a small southern sect, dressed in blue and wearing a bamboo hat, was approaching the scene of battle. No one noticed that in the Imperial Court's diplomatic mission, an extremely unremarkable soldier was approaching the White Tiger Divine General.

Wuqiong Bi descended onto the plateau. She looked at the horsetail whisk in her hand, a perplexed expression on her face.

She had been immersed in the Divine Domain for many years and had been cultivating for even longer. Not even she could count all the strange things she had experienced.

But none of them had inflicted a greater psychological blow to her than the events of the last two days.

How could there be someone who dared to kill her most beloved son?

How could two juniors fight her to a draw?

She recalled all the sword styles she had encountered in her life but still could not understand.

Xu Yourong had used the eighth move of South Stream Temple Sword Style's introductory moves while Chen Changsheng had used the Blazing Sword that Su Li had taught him. Let alone being similar, these two sword techniques could be said in terms of sword intent to be complete opposites, incompatible in every way. But why was it that these two sword techniques harmonized so well when used together?

This was undoubtedly no ordinary combined technique. This sort of combination was so perfect that it was not merely intentionally working together. It was more like they were secretly in accord with the laws of the world, acting according to what was natural. The defense was flawless, the attacks unfathomable, and the sword energy increased as its might continued to multiply!

Like Wuqiong Bi, many insightful experts on the plateau were

pondering this question.

So were Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

The first time, Xu Yourong had broken out of seclusion and flown over as a fiery Phoenix, intending to use the sword intent accumulated from her two years of seclusion to force her way in.

She had not expected that the attack that Chen Changsheng used would have such a large effect.

When his sword and her sword met, they seemed to form a connection.

This was an incredibly mysterious connection. One could only sense it, as it was too difficult to describe with words.

They used different sword styles, but this connection allowed them to naturally cooperate. Even their sword intents seemed to become one.

On the second time, this feeling was even clearer, even more distinct.

They could accurately sense what the other was thinking.

The two swords were also apparently able to sense the trajectory and angle of the other.

The sword techniques were still different, but their sword intents were as one.

It was like two jewels hidden beneath a layer of mossy rock. As they ground against each other, they revealed their true appearances and then combined into one jewel of peerless beauty.

But just what had happened? How had it happened?

Xu Yourong smiled at him and asked, "When did you learn the Unity Sword Art?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "When I went to see you on the summit yesterday, I was bored, so I read a few books."

Chapter 899 – Together

Several sects had rushed down the mountain to find those disciples that had been thrown off the cliff, but the vast majority of people remained. They were still immersed in the shock from what they had witnessed, and upon hearing the short exchange between Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng, they were even more stunned.

The Prince of Xiang's expression became somewhat stern as he thought, Chen Changsheng is truly a genius of the sword. In just two days, he managed to learn South Stream Temple's Unity Sword Art. The White Tiger Divine General's eyes turned increasingly intimidating, a hint of killing intent flashing across them. The level of understanding Chen Changsheng had displayed in the sword had clearly increased the White Tiger Divine General's desire to kill him.

The disciples of South Stream Temple were even more astonished, thinking in shame, I've been cultivating the Unity Sword Art since I was a child, yet my understanding is far inferior to His Holiness's comprehension after only two days. Huai Ren and Huai Shu were also somewhat surprised while Huai Bi incredulously shrieked, "This can't possibly be the Unity Sword Art!"

The Unity Sword Art was a secret art of South Stream Temple and was the foundation of its sword array. It had extremely high demands on the user, and she simply could not believe that Chen Changsheng would be able to grasp this secret sword art of South Stream Temple in two short days. Moreover, even if it was the Unity Sword Art, it could not possibly display so much power that it could resist an expert of the Divine Domain.

A wind suddenly stirred over the plateau, shrouding it in sand and gravel and causing cries of shock to rise once more.

No one noticed Wuqiong Bi silently arrive above the rocky

outcrop and once more attack Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong. Casting aside her status, she had launched a sneak attack!

Two sword glows rushed forward together, two pure and clean arcs of light hanging over the mountains as they endlessly hummed.

The cooperation of Chen Changsheng's and Xu Yourong's swords was now even more natural and unrestrained, the sword intent even more masterly and unfathomable.

Wuqiong Bi let loose another roar of rage and reluctance. Powerless to break these two sword glows, she was forced back to the ground.

With a clap, a hole about half a foot deep appeared on the plateau.

This hole was surrounded by straight and sharp sword marks.

The clouds over the plateau had been chopped apart by the soaring sword intent. The wisps of clouds hung still in the air, looking like sword marks as well.

Those sword slashes were all remnants of sword intent. That they were able to take shape in the world was evidence of how awe-inspiring this sword intent was.

It was still a draw.

Wuqiong Bi thought of her son's miserable death. Her face paled, her fury and antipathy reached their peak, and she yelled to the heavens, "Do you not have eyes!"

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong stood side by side. They glanced at each other and smiled.

The two recalled the feeling when their sword unified. They had been carefree; their hearts had been opened. It was the most beautiful moment of their lives.

They had truly used the Unity Sword Art, but it was also not that

simple. Huai Bi had good reason to disbelieve, as though the Unity Sword Art of South Stream Temple really could increase the might of a sword technique, it could not pull off the world-shaking feat they had accomplished today.

Chen Changsheng had felt that there was something strange about the Unity Sword Art used by the two South Stream Temple disciples at the mountain gate yesterday. His comprehensions at the summit of Holy Maiden Peak had caused him to faintly understand the source of this, and today, he finally had proof of his conjectures. He sighed, "I didn't think it could be used in reverse."

Xu Yourong replied, "I was just bored and wanted to try. I didn't think that you would be able to coordinate with me."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Maybe it was because I memorized it backward."

Xu Yourong said, "I actually forgot."

Chen Changsheng commented, "It was very risky."

Xu Yourong had greatly altered the Unity Sword Art. This was extremely risky and could even be considered a gamble.

This altered Unity Sword Art required the user to have absolute confidence in their partner, for their minds to be connected, allowing their combined might to greatly multiply. On the other hand, the slightest doubt would not only cause the sword art to fail, but also bring great danger to the user.

Absolute trust and connected minds were no easy feats. Even amongst the South Stream Temple disciples, who had cultivated the Unity Sword Art for many years and could form the sword array, only a scant few could do these things. Logically speaking, someone with the status of Holy Maiden Xu Yourong would not have made such risky alterations, but Chen Changsheng already knew that the girl that he loved was not the unsullied and holy fairy that the common people imagined. Rather, she was a girl that

liked to gamble, so her doing such a thing was no surprise.

Of course, this was only cultivating the basis of the altered Unity Sword Art. For instance, the two girls guarding the mountain gate had used the Unity Sword Art to strengthen their attacks, but they could not possibly have done what Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng did, as the altered Unity Sword Art truly had too high demands on the user.

The alterations Xu Yourong made to the Unity Sword Art originated from her experience cultivating the Halving Blade Style together with Chen Changsheng in the Garden of Zhou.

At the time, she had begun memorizing the Halving Blade Style from the first technique while Chen Changsheng had begun from the last, a process they continued until they met somewhere in the middle.

She placed all that she had comprehended into altering the Unity Sword Art.

A year later, she made an appointment with Chen Changsheng in the Mausoleum of Books, where they thought, discussed, and comprehended in front of the monolith hut.

She placed all that she had gained into altering the Unity Sword Art as well.

This was the distilled knowledge of a cultivating genius that was then further refined. It was also a recollection of the past, a yearning for another person.

Chen Changsheng's mind was connected with hers, and they had absolute trust in each other.

He was a part of those experiences, learning the Halving Blade Style and sharing his understanding of the monolith inscriptions.

Those comprehensions and knowledge were common between the two of them. He could accurately predict what she was thinking and coordinate his actions.

To learn this sword style, one first had to learn the Unity Sword Art, and then comprehend the Heavenly Tome Monoliths together, and finally, one had to learn the Halving Blade Style.

The foundation of all this was an absolute trust.

If one looked across the world, looked back one thousand years, the only people to fulfill these conditions were Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

Thus, only he and she had the ability to use this sword style.

Just like how, regardless of all the people on this plateau, they only had eyes for each other.

Those people were all looking at them.

The gentle breeze blew. Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong stood side by side, their expressions calm, their eyes clear and bright, their clothes swaying in the breeze. They possessed an unearthly aura.

They were truly a beautiful couple.

They truly deserved to be called celestial Dao companions.

.....

.....

A voice sounded through the plateau.

"The Daoist Canon has records of an art in which two swords work in harmony, describing it with the most mystical of words. Yet for a thousand years, it has never been witnessed. Seeing it today, it truly is incomparably profound."

Bie Yanghong continued, "It must be said that you two are truly a match made in heaven."

Many people couldn't agree more with these words. 'Match made in heaven' seemed like a phrase made to describe Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

One was the Pope while the other was the Holy Maiden of the south. The two once had an engagement, and after countless incidents, they still ended up falling in love with each other. Both of them were the most talented of cultivating geniuses, reaching Star Condensation at a young age. Now, when their two swords worked in harmony, they were even able to resist an expert of the Divine Domain.

In every aspect, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were a perfect fit for the phrase 'match made in heaven'.

Gou Hanshi, Bai Cai, and the other disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect were still in shock over the sword art used by Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong, but upon hearing this statement, they couldn't help but feel something else.

What would their eldest brother think if he saw this sight, heard these words?

"Normally, I would be full of praise after witnessing such a mystical sword style, and even down three cups of wine to liven the mood. Alas, I cannot today."

Bie Yanghong paused, then continued, "Although that son was unvirtuous and unworthy, I am his father, so I have to do a few things on his behalf."

Chapter 900 – What Should Have Severed All Connects Them

Through the Fated Star Plate, Xu Yourong had already calculated that something was wrong, and after listening to Chen Changsheng's recount, she quickly realized what exactly was going on. She naturally believed Chen Changsheng's words, but just when she was prepared to say something, she suddenly noticed the fatigue on Bie Yanghong's face and the streaks of white in his hair, causing her to stop.

The pain of losing one's child was truly one of the most unbearable matters in the world.

Bie Yanghong walked up to Wuqiong Bi and gently patted her on the shoulder. "Rest a while."

Wuqiong Bi had failed to kill Chen Changsheng, and was even incapable of defeating him and Xu Yourong, causing her to be furious and unwilling, her mood at its most irritable. When she heard these words, she felt both wronged and anguished, weeping as she yelled, "You're coming forth at last!"

Her words were not false. Given Bie Yanghong's strength, if he had struck with all his might at the very start, even that metal blade might not have been able to stop the two of them from killing Chen Changsheng, let alone Xu Yourong and the girls of South Stream Temple.

Now, he finally came forth.

In the former Storms of the Eight Directions, Bie Yanghong had been one of the strongest in terms of fighting prowess. Even the Tianhai Divine Empress had greatly admired him.

With a true expert of the continent attacking, how could Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong continue to resist?

"If I gave you two another day, no, perhaps only a few rounds,

the two of you would have completely harmonized your sword, leaving no more gaps. Not I or anyone else would have been able to deal with you two, so I must deeply apologize—I cannot give you two this chance."

Bie Yanghong looked at Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong and said, "I will strive to part you two with one technique, and then defeat you."

By the time these words left his mouth, he was already attacking Chen Changsheng.

A small red flower was tied to the pinkie of his right hand.

The entire continent knew that this red flower was Bie Yanghong's strongest weapon and also the quintessence of his entire cultivation.

At the foot of the Mausoleum of Books, the Tianhai Divine Empress's fist had stunned the Storms, just one of her punches killing Guan Xingke. It was through the little red flower that Bie Yanghong had barely managed to receive the other punch.

When Bie Yanghong attacked, the little red flower would very naturally float up and in front of his finger, maintaining a distance of about half a foot.

The red flower reached Chen Changsheng even sooner than Bie Yanghong's hand.

Chen Changsheng could already see the sparkling beads of water on its petals.

Without even time to think, he thrust the Stainless Sword forward. As it pierced silently through the air, it left behind a bright trail of light on the plateau.

This time, he used the Intellectual Sword. He sought a strange trajectory to avoid the red flower, his ultimate goal being Bie Yanghong's brow.

At the same time, Xu Yourong's temple sword slashed through the air, silent and lightless. It trembled in the wind, appearing surprisingly delicate.

She used the Little Study Sword. It was said that many years ago, some senior of South Stream Temple residing in a detached study on the upper reaches of the Flower Stream created this sword style after observing the winter plums silently bloom on some winter day. This sword style sought victory through cunning. It appeared fragile, but it was actually extremely tough.

The Intellectual Sword and the Little Study Sword had no relation to each other and their sword intents shared no common traits, but just like before, the moment when Chen Changsheng's and Xu Yourong's techniques simultaneously appeared on the plateau, they underwent a mystical transformation. They perfectly fused into one, leaving behind not a single flaw.

Bie Yanghong had observed the pair's exchanges with Wuqiong Bi and understood that this was a combination sword style based on South Stream Temple's Unity Sword Art. However, he still could not completely understand how this combination sword style could allow two completely opposite sword techniques and sword intents to fuse together and also suddenly increase their power.

Only now, when facing this bright sword glow and delicate sword, when he was in the thick of it, could he faintly grasp at its principles.

This profound and indescribable feeling was not a sword style or sword technique, but more like a straightforward method that was utterly different from the art of the sword.

This method was one of incomparable power and ingenuity. It was like a torrential rain over the sea, and also like an eagle looking down upon a lava-covered land. It was ruthless to the extreme and bursting with danger. The moment it was used, it

seemed able to sever all things in the world, cut off all connections.

But Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were seemingly using this method in reverse!

The torrential rain descended over the lava, the moist and hot mist gradually transforming into calm and clear water. The mouth of the mountain solidified and filled, becoming a blue lake, and countless green plants sprouted on its shores, brimming with vigor!

In their hands, a method that should have severed all connections in the world became a method that could connect everything in the world!

Bie Yanghong could not think of any Daoist method in Holy Maiden Peak, the Li Palace, or the Ten Thousand Years Pavilion that was like this method, nor could he recall any records on such a thing.

In the current world, other than Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong themselves, only Wang Po, and Wang Zhice if he suddenly reappeared in society, would know of this method.

But since Bie Yanghong wanted to break Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng's sword style, he did not need to understand, only break it.

Even if he did not have a complete grasp of it at the moment, he could use his far superior cultivation and vast reserves of true essence to crush this sword style.

The seemingly delicate red flower reached the sky of sword silhouettes.

Suddenly, the flower apparently became extremely heavy, its progress becoming much slower.

Even space itself seemed to twist at the red flower's weight. Sand and stones roiled while winds howled.

The sword silhouettes momentarily slowed, their sword energy still as majestic as a great mountain, but no longer perfect. The unbroken mountain range became two green mountains divided by a canyon. A gap had been opened between them, a path.

This gap persisted for only an instant. Any other cultivator would have found it impossible to use, even if they could see it.

But Bie Yanghong was a grand expert of supreme cultivation, and besides, this gap in the sword energy had been his handiwork.

The slow red flower suddenly exploded forward. Shining with a dark red light, it struck Chen Changsheng's face.

If Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong continued their sword technique, even if they made their sword energy unmovable once more, it was no longer possible to keep out the little red flower.

Chen Changsheng unflinchingly abandoned the Intellectual Sword and almost instantly brought his sword back in front of his eyes.

He did not use the Stupid Sword, but made his sword resonate as it cleaved through the air.

The hum of his sword was so clear and bright that it seemed to have an edge as it resounded through the plateau.

It was that same technique he used against Xu Yourong on the capital's Bridge of Helplessness: the Descent of Heavenly Music!

In the same moment Chen Changsheng drew back his sword, Xu Yourong acted in concert, dispersing the Little Study Sword and thrusting the temple sword towards the sky.

She did not have the time to bring her sword back to its sheath, so she treated the world as her sheath. This action of hers was returning the sword.

Her action of returning the sword seemed to be divided into countless pictures that were then recombined.

The true essence attached to her sword collided and grinded against the air, causing the sword to hum.

When these hums were brought together, they became a long and timeworn sword cry.

This was the first attack she had used on the capital's Bridge of Helplessness: the South Sea Sword Cry!

Table of Contents

[Way of Choices](#)

[Synopsis](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Chapter 801 – Praising the Divine](#)

[Chapter 802 – The Divine Edict Descends Like Thunder](#)

[Chapter 803 – Come, Soldiers and Warriors](#)

[Chapter 804 – Array Yourselves Before Me](#)

[Chapter 805 – The Hard Journey](#)

[Chapter 806 – The Rare Sight of an Autumn City in the Spring Wind](#)

[Chapter 807 – One Cannot Sleep Well Lodging Amongst the Willows](#)

[Chapter 808 – Morning Light, Kitchen Fog, a Freak](#)

[Chapter 809 – He Comes from the Yellow Springs](#)

[Chapter 810 – Beneath the Ancient Scholar Tree, Have No Other Thoughts](#)

[Chapter 811 – How Deep Is the Affection of the People in the Courtyard?](#)

[Chapter 812 – The Solitary Star Returns](#)

[Chapter 813 – Everyone that You Treat and Save... Isn't Human](#)

[Chapter 814 – A New Comrade](#)

[Chapter 815 – The Mysterious Expert from the West](#)

[Chapter 816 – The Great Western Continent's Ambitions](#)

[Chapter 817 – The Myriad Golden Leaves of the Wenshui](#)

[Chapter 818 – Singing in the Night Inside and Outside the Daoist Church](#)

[Chapter 819 – The Stamping of Hooves Disorders the Morning Light](#)

[Chapter 820 – The Spring Breeze Enters the Old City](#)

[Book 6: Fierce the West Wind](#)

[Chapter 821 – The Palm Falls Toward the Stone](#)

[Chapter 822 – Like a Mountain! Like a Sea! Like a Banner!](#)

[Chapter 823 – Discussing Punishment](#)

[Chapter 824 – Ruthless Red](#)

[Chapter 825 – A Prayer Mat](#)

[Chapter 826 – What I Miss](#)

[Chapter 827 – Without My Permission, the Sun Cannot Set Behind the Mountains](#)

[Chapter 828 – The Water Grass at the Bottom of the Wenshui](#)

[Chapter 829 – Assassination on the Shore of the Wenshui](#)

[Chapter 830 – The Sword's Tip Must Be Revealed](#)

[Chapter 831 – On a Sleepless Night, Nothing to Do but Follow the Water](#)

[Chapter 832 – The Pope Comes to Visit the People of the Chief Branch](#)

[Chapter 833 – I Dearly Wish to See the Old Master](#)
[Chapter 834 – That Generation of Elders](#)
[Chapter 835 – The Old Estate's Ancient Well, Pickled Vegetables and Porridge](#)
[Chapter 836 – A Cup of Tea](#)
[Chapter 837 – Standing in the Snow](#)
[Chapter 838 – Taking Your Umbrella in the Snow](#)
[Chapter 839 – Ah, Qiushan...](#)
[Chapter 840 – The Unspeaking Person in the Ancestral Hall](#)
[Chapter 841 – I'll Make the Ancestral Hall a Mahjong Den](#)
[Chapter 842 – A Shout Throws the Snowstorm into Chaos](#)
[Chapter 843 – A Tong Cottage Set Ablaze](#)
[Chapter 844 – Torture Chamber](#)
[Chapter 845 – Seven Peddlers and Six Government Laborers](#)
[Chapter 846 – Five Kinds of Peerless Techniques](#)
[Chapter 847 – A Zither-Playing Old Man](#)
[Chapter 848 – The True Identities of the Two Old Guardians](#)
[Chapter 849 – In the Name of Convenience](#)
[Chapter 850 – Second Master Has Something to Say](#)
[Chapter 851 – A Sedan Chair Arrives Outside the City](#)
[Chapter 852 – Assassination in the Ancestral Hall](#)
[Chapter 853 – Group Assault](#)
[Chapter 854 – Walking Out of the Ancestral Hall](#)
[Chapter 855 – It's My Turn to Talk](#)
[Chapter 856 – A New Mahjong Game](#)
[Chapter 857 – The Most Outstanding Prodigal Son](#)
[Chapter 858 – Before and After the Sun Sets Behind the Mountains](#)
[Chapter 859 – It's Pitch-Black on That Side](#)
[Chapter 860 – Parting Beneath the Peach Blossoms Outside the Nunnery](#)
[Chapter 861 – The Aroma of Tea Fills Both the Mountain and City](#)
[Chapter 862 – A Prince Appears from the Rivers and Hills of the Generation](#)
[Chapter 863 – Winter's Wild Spear and Tea](#)
[Chapter 864 – A Porter Forged From Steel](#)
[Chapter 865 – The Visible Trajectory of a Claw](#)
[Chapter 866 – I Can Stand a Little Higher](#)
[Chapter 867 – Part of a Sight That Others Can Only Watch from a Distance](#)
[Chapter 868 – The Breeze over the River Is Cool](#)
[Chapter 869 – I Will Wait for You in the Abyss](#)
[Chapter 870 – The Secret Sinking into the Depths of the River](#)
[Chapter 871 – The Chronicle of the Mountain Gate](#)

[Chapter 872 – Holy Maiden Peak in the Clouds](#)
[Chapter 873 – Two Sides of the Stone Wall](#)
[Chapter 874 – I Remember Well Those Beautiful Sights](#)
[Chapter 875 – South Stream Temple's Martial Grandaunt?](#)
[Chapter 876 – Donation Money](#)
[Chapter 877 – The Reason for South Stream Temple's Chaos](#)
[Chapter 878 – The Thatched Cottage's Huai Ren](#)
[Chapter 879 – The White Crane Sends for Reinforcements](#)
[Chapter 880 – Closing the Temple](#)
[Chapter 881 – A Conversation That Will Be Recorded in the Annals of History](#)
[Chapter 882 – The Imperial Court's Diplomatic Mission Arrives](#)
[Chapter 883 – The Surging of the River Also Cannot Wash Away This Hatred](#)
[Chapter 884 – Meeting Old Friends at the Summit](#)
[Chapter 885 – The Grand Ceremony Begins](#)
[Chapter 886 – Does Anyone Object?](#)
[Chapter 887 – If You Ask Me, My Answer Is No](#)
[Chapter 888 – This Is a Divine Edict](#)
[Chapter 889 – A Storm Descends upon the Mountain](#)
[Chapter 890 – Condemnation](#)
[Chapter 891 – Who Will Stand in Front of Him?](#)
[Chapter 892 – The Sword Array of South Stream Temple!](#)
[Chapter 893 – To All the People of the World, I Am Roasting Fish by a Stream](#)
[Chapter 894 – Give Up or Surrender?](#)
[Chapter 895 – The Breaker of the Array, an Ant](#)
[Chapter 896 – The Hopeless Situation After Three Sword Techniques](#)
[Chapter 897 – Within the Great Light, the Phoenix Comes](#)
[Chapter 898 – Unity Sword Art](#)
[Chapter 899 – Together](#)
[Chapter 900 – What Should Have Severed All Connects Them](#)